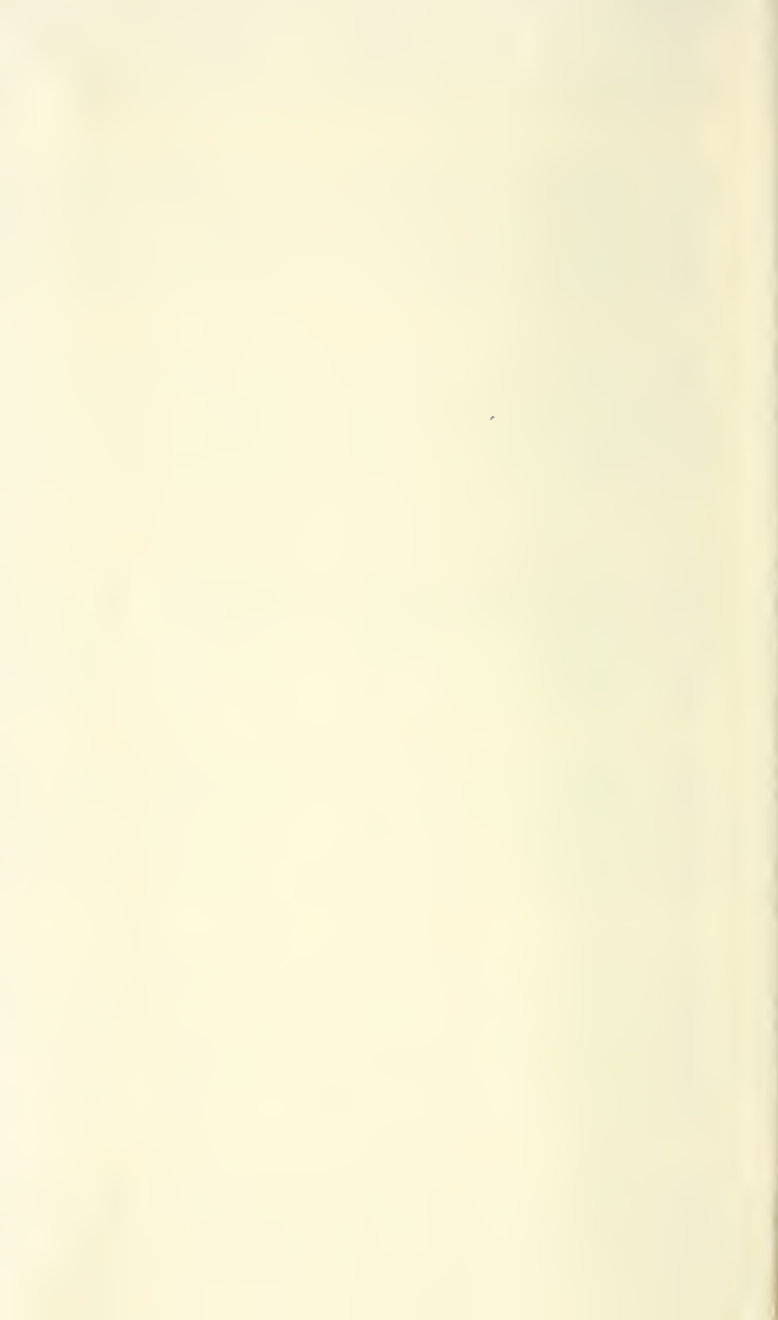




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THE GIPSY GIRL.

LORD FITZWARINE.

BY

“SCRUTATOR,”

AUTHOR OF “THE MASTER OF THE HOUNDS,”
“THE SQUIRE OF BEECHWOOD,” ETC.



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LORD FITZWARINE.

CHAPTER I.

CHARLOTTE NORMAN had not, like Florence, been deceived as to Lord Purvis's real intentions. She had learnt from an old beau she had met at Bertie's ball (a near relation of his lordship's) everything about him, adding this advice :—

“He is the man for *you*, Charlotte ;—lots of money—capital house in town—gives grand entertainments, and all that sort of thing ; but having married one fashionable wife, he wants a second of the opposite character—*young, modest, and unassuming, you*

understand, to make a happy mother of children ; in fact, the chief desire of his heart is to have heirs to his immense property ; and, like Rachel, he feels, if he does not say so, ‘ Give me children, or I die ! ’ With olive-branches round his table, therefore—(he looks the colour of an olive)—you may do with him as you please ; so throw your net accordingly, and we may then look forward to some happy reunions in London.”

Men soon discover the true characters of women, and how far they may go with them ; and Charlotte’s old beau felt no hesitation in entering upon these particulars with her, which he would not have presumed to do with a young, modest girl. From this first opening afforded by her esteemed friend into Lord Purvis’s expectations, Charlotte resolved to do her best—and that amounted to a great deal—in trying to hoodwink this haughty peer. The comparison between a house in town, a fine place in the country, title, and wealth added, with the old Abbey, in which to be immured all her life, would not stand a moment’s deliberation with this mercenary-

mind woman ; neither can it be supposed she would be influenced by any regard to Mrs. Seaton, or her very dear friend Florence's views in this matter, although scrupulously concealing from both her real purpose.

The day following Mrs. Seaton's explanation with her daughter, Lord Purvis called again, when Charlotte's quick perception detected the altered manner of Florence towards him ; and when alone with her afterwards, she said playfully, " Well, my dear, I conclude, from your grave deportment, his Lordship has proposed for your hand."

" Indeed he has not," was the short reply.

" Then, my dear girl, it is only a pleasure deferred for a little while ; and, of course, the only answer you can give will be, ' Ask mamma.' "

" That is not the answer, of course, I should give, Charlotte."

" What ! my dear," exclaimed Charlotte, in feigned surprise, " refuse such an offer as this ! reject a man like Lord Purvis !—gentlemanly—agreeable—not good-looking, I admit, with

a face the colour of a kite's claw—still in every other respect quite unexceptionable, saving, perhaps, a little peculiarity of temper, which would give way to your bewitching smiles—why, my dear girl, the world will think you crazy not to accept with alacrity this golden apple, literally thrown at your feet.”

“Our opinions on these points differ very materially, Charlotte; and I could not accept any man on account solely of title and worldly considerations.”

“Well, my dear, I cannot blame you, at your age, and in your position, an only child, doted on by your mother, beautiful and accomplished, for declining to accept, without ample time for reflection, the first offer made you by a man who was your father's school-fellow; and from the remarks I heard made at the ball on Miss Seaton's faultless form, gracefulness of manner, and, last, though not least in man's opinion, surpassing loveliness, you are fully justified in aspiring to even a higher rank than Lord Purvis holds, and a far more youthful lover.”

“I have no ambition of that kind,” replied Florence.

“Then, my dear, what answer do you intend giving Lord Purvis?”

“It will be time enough to consider the answer, when the proposal is made, if it ever is, Charlotte; so now I must take my pet puppy for a walk.”

Florence, from her friend's extreme curiosity to know her sentiments in regard to Lord Purvis, suspected some latent cause for it, and therefore prudently resolved not to express any decided opinion on the matter, although fully prepared how to act; but she took especial care not to be found or left alone during the succeeding visits of Lord Purvis, for which Charlotte was disposed to afford her few opportunities, by sitting nearly the whole day working at a piece of embroidery, which she had commenced some four or five years previously, and to which she had recourse only on particular occasions, to attract the attention of some quiet, domestically inclined man to her very industrious habits of life. Having discovered the dislike of Lord Purvis to bra-

vura singing, her music books were laid aside, and with them her witty, flighty conversation, so that Mrs. Seaton remarked the sudden change, but attributing it to a different cause, said one day, "You appear, my dear, suffering from a severe attack this time. Are you so desperately in love with Mr. Fitzwarine? or have you had a little disagreement, as he has not called very often lately?"

"Oh! nothing particular, my dear Mrs. Seaton," she replied, evasively, "although, I fear, he thinks me rather too much of a flirt to suit his sober ideas."

"And therefore, Charlotte, I conclude," added Mrs. Seaton, laughing, "you consider it advisable to alter your tactics."

"We must all bend to circumstances, you know," replied Charlotte, with a smile; "and it is prudent to practise before marriage what we shall be obliged to do after it; and I imagine there will be a pretty amount of plain work as well as embroidery required by the fortunate wife of Mr. Hugh Fitzwarine to kill time in that dismal old Abbey."

These words had scarcely escaped her lips,

when the door opened, and Hugh was announced, whose presence (fearing she might have been overheard) caused so deep a blush to suffuse her face, and such embarrassment of manner, on rising to shake hands with him, that Mrs. Seaton felt fully persuaded of Charlotte's attachment to the young Abbot. On being reproached for his long absence, nearly a fortnight, Hugh excused himself by pleading an engagement, which was partly, but not wholly the cause of it; for Hugh, with his mettlesome temper, did not feel quite certain that he could command this unruly and rebellious subject in the presence of Lord Purvis, of whose constant visits to Forest Lodge he had, of course, been informed; and his reported encouragement by the young lady, which, although not crediting, caused considerable irritability and very unpleasant sensations to arise in his mind. With the stern, proud feelings inseparable from his nature, which forbade his submitting himself to any obligations from others, and thinking in after-life he might be subjected to reflections for standing in her path to title and riches, of

which he saw other girls so ambitious, he had now come over to offer Florence a release from her engagement to himself, which, by the way, he did not believe she would accept. Still, he argued, it ought and should be tendered without further delay.

Now Florence, feeling rather offended at what she considered Hugh's neglect, did not condescend to make her appearance until the luncheon hour, when he was received more formally than usual, which Hugh construed into already assumed Lady Purvis-like airs, so that scarcely any conversation passed between them; but bridling his rising indignation, he kept to the object of his visit; and having at last caught her eye, he gave her a preconcerted signal for meeting him in the glen, when he had news of importance to communicate.

The signal was acknowledged by Florence rising soon after from the table, and Hugh, allowing time to put on her bonnet and reach the place, then took his leave. Their meeting was at first constrained, until Hugh explained the cause of his absence. "And

now, dear Florence," he continued, "I have sought one more interview with you in the glen, to release you from the rash vow you have made."

"What do you mean, Hugh?" she enquired, in great agitation at this startling announcement.

"This, dear Florence," he added calmly. "I have, of course, heard of Lord Purvis's intentions towards you; and dearly and devotedly as I ever must love you, yet in after-life, when the romantic affections of youth have sobered down, you might reproach me for taking advantage of your first girlish fancy, and debarring you from rank, riches, and honours, now offered to your acceptance."

"Answer me one question only, Hugh," she said, after a pause. "Do you believe from your heart I could ever reproach you, in after-life, were our lot the lowliest on earth?"

"No, my own dear girl, I believe you never would."

"Or that I could be happy, Hugh, with a bad-tempered old man, however great and rich, whom I could never love?"

“No, Florence, I think you would not; although honours and riches are dearly prized, as certain almost to confer the greatest pleasures in life.”

“Save two, my dear Hugh—contentment and peace of mind. Now, Hugh, listen to me one moment. Had I never known *you*, I would never marry any man, however rich, or great, or agreeable, unless I could love and respect him for his virtues, religious principles, and good-tempered, affectionate disposition. Lord Purvis possesses none of these qualities, that I have yet been able to discover; and did he possess them all in the highest degree, my heart, dear Hugh, I could not offer him, and without that, my hand shall never be given.”

“Florence, my own darling girl,” said Hugh, clasping her to his heart, “do not believe for a second I ever doubted your entire devotion to myself—but—”

“I will save your further explanation, Hugh,” she said. “You are not a little jealous of this Lord Purvis and these reports, and so have come over to vent your spleen on poor Florence.”

“No, indeed, my dear love, I did not ; but to give you a week to consider whether you had not better take the old Peer, instead of the young boor, as I have been called.”

“Very considerate, dear Hugh,” she added, playfully ; “and now, having made me this handsome offer, I shall insist on your riding over again to-morrow—or stay—the next day, after luncheon, and you may then see by daylight the man you would have me marry against my will, and your friend Charlotte playing her old part of a ‘bold stroke for a husband.’ Dear mamma thinks she pines for love of the young Abbot, sitting so quiet, and working all day ; whereas, she is trying to weave a web for the old Peer. Really, Hugh, you must come ; you will be as much amused as by the theatricals at Belvidere.”

“Well, my dear girl, you may depend on seeing me, so now God bless you, farewell ;” and, after folding her again in his arms, he sprang lightly on his horse, and was soon lost to her view amidst the mazes of the wood.

It soon became apparent to Lord Purvis, from her continued reserve of manner in his presence, that the chance of obtaining the hand of Florence was extremely problematical, if not entirely hopeless; but the spell of fascination thrown around him by Charlotte Norman began to take effect upon his uxorious feelings. She was nearly as handsome as Florence, though in a different style; in form and figure her equal, well informed and cultivated in mind, exceedingly graceful and ladylike, and almost as youthful in appearance; and Lord Purvis, considering marriage as a sort of business, began to think Charlotte might supply the place of Florence, and, in some respects, prove better adapted to his purpose, for a finer woman he could not have selected to preside at the head of his establishment. Then her domestic habits, sensible and cheerful conversation, were additional recommendations; so that, after pondering well upon the subject, he came at last to the resolution of first speaking to Mrs. Seaton, which he felt in honour bound to do, respecting her daughter.

For this purpose, he requested a private interview with her the same day Florence met Hugh in the glen, and begged to be informed if there was any prospect of Miss Seaton giving a favourable reception to his addresses; he would feel greatly obliged if she would speak with her daughter that evening, and inform him of the result at his next visit, although he feared she was little disposed to favour his suit.

Mrs. Seaton's not pressing her daughter to accept Lord Purvis may be accounted for (as she had been most anxious for the alliance) by her receiving an anonymous letter that week, which, although anonymous, gave her considerable uneasiness. It bore the London post-mark, and ran thus :—

“Beware your daughter marries not Lord Purvis, or her fate will be misery for life. I have known her from childhood, and take a deep interest in her welfare. If she marries a man I approve, her fortune will be greater than that she would have from this haughty

Peer.—Florence Seaton shall be no portionless bride.”

Mrs. Seaton puzzled her brain in vain conjectures who could be the writer, but did not deem it prudent to mention it to her daughter. The same evening, therefore, Mrs. Seaton had a long conversation with Florence, representing, as before, the great advantages of such a connection; her increasing esteem for Lord Purvis, who had greatly improved on more intimate acquaintance; and her total disbelief of the reports respecting his bad temper and ill treatment of his first wife.

“My dearest mother,” replied Florence, “you would not wish to see me wretched for life, and I really could never like Lord Purvis, with whom I find no reciprocity of feelings or ideas—indeed, dearest mamma, I have no wish to leave you yet,” she said, bursting into tears; “could I ever find any one to love me more than you do?”

“No, my darling child,” replied Mrs. Seaton, pressing her to her breast, and now quite overcome herself, “you never could.”

“ You would not break my heart, dearest mamma,” continued Florence, sobbing, “ by marrying me to Lord Purvis?”

“ God forbid, my dear child,—it is enough—I will urge you no more on this subject, so kiss me, and dry your tears.”

CHAPTER II.

LORD PURVIS, although rather annoyed, did not express any surprise on learning from Mrs. Seaton, the next day, her daughter's disinclination to accept his addresses, which she modified as much as possible, and was pleased to hear from his lordship that he hoped still to retain Mrs. Seaton's friendship, with permission to visit as usual at Forest Lodge. This being readily acceded to, they parted on very cordial terms, Mrs. Seaton promising that what had occurred should never be revealed to a third person.

Great, however, was that lady's astonishment, when told the following week by his

Lordship, that he had proposed to, and been accepted by Charlotte Norman, and requesting her, as an old friend of that lady's mother, to obtain Mrs. Norman's consent to the marriage, which, being about to travel on the continent for some months, he was desirous should take place as early as possible, and in as quiet a manner, having himself great objections to unnecessary parade of every kind.

"Perhaps, my dear madam," continued his Lordship, "you would not object to Miss Norman's continuing your guest a little longer, until she becomes my wife, and the ceremony can then be performed at the parish church?"

To this request a willing compliance was granted by Mrs. Seaton, for which Lord Purvis returned his grateful obligations in the most courteous language.

Although taken at first by surprise at this unexpected declaration of Lord Purvis, Mrs. Seaton knew Charlotte sufficiently well to account for her preferring the rich nobleman to the young country squire of small fortune, although reproaching her for attempting to gain his affections; and on congratulating

her, after Lord Purvis's departure, upon the conquest she had achieved, made some allusion to Fitzwarine's disappointment.

Now Miss Charlotte, conscience-stricken by her purposed ingratitude to her kind hostess, in resolving to secure this rich prize for herself by every means in her power, even had Florence felt inclined to accept it, expected no less than some severe rebukes for her treacherous conduct, and an almost immediate dismissal from Forest Lodge; in fact, she sat like a convicted criminal in the presence of a judge about to pass sentence of death upon him, her downcast eyes and burning cheeks betraying her shame, when Mrs. Seaton, attributing these signs to modest confusion, by her cheerful manner and kind address restored her to self-possession; finding the secret intentions of her heart were known only to herself, and Florence's happy smile on entering the room soon after, and addressing her playfully as Lady Purvis, satisfied her she had no reproach in store for her false-hearted friend.

Lord Purvis, a few days after, having ex-

pressed to Charlotte his desire to set out on his travels as early as possible, pressed her to name an early day for the wedding, which, after many blushes and well-feigned confusion, she said she would leave entirely to his Lordship; when, with a warm embrace, he softly enquired if that day three weeks would be too early; and no response being given, another embrace followed, as a reward for her kind consent to his wishes. This point being conceded, her enamoured lord pressed upon her acceptance a pocket-book containing notes to the amount of a thousand pounds, with which to provide a *trousseau* such as became the future Lady Purvis.

Deep blushes and beaming eyes were again brought into requisition, with thanks expressed in such a modest and affectionate manner, as to make her aged lover congratulate himself on the choice he had made.

“Pray do all as quickly as possible,” he said, looking on her with rapture, “for I am impatient to obtain my beautiful treasure.”

It has been said “old fools are the greatest

fools," and in love affairs Lord Purvis proved no exception to the general rule.

Mrs. Norman and her second daughter arrived from London the next week, and the former being of good old family, and, like Charlotte, very agreeable and lady-like, Lord Purvis felt much pleased with the connection.

The fortnight, however, passed heavily to a man of Lord Purvis's impatient temper; but his solicitor, knowing his impetuosity, and dreading the loss of his favours, immediately executed his instructions as to the settlement on his future wife, by which she was given a thousand a-year as pin-money, and a handsome jointure in the event of his death, everything being completed a few days before the ceremony was to take place. The two Miss Medwyns were asked as bridesmaids, with Florence and Charlotte's sister, to whom Lord Purvis made handsome presents, Lord and Lady Lessingham being the only other persons invited by him to be present at the ceremony.

A handsome breakfast was duly prepared

at Forest Lodge on the auspicious morning, at which Hugh Fitzwarine and the Middletons were present, besides those already named. When sitting by the side of Florence, Hugh whispered, "You might have stood in Charlotte's place."

"Not for the world would I change places with her," was the low response.

On the completion of the forms and ceremonies observed on such occasions, Charlotte Lady Purvis returned to Forest Lodge to change her dress; and in an hour after the happy couple were whirled away by four horses on their wedding tour.

The night before Charlotte's marriage Mrs. Seaton was giving her some useful and very necessary advice in her own room respecting her future conduct as a married woman; and speaking of her flirtations, said she feared she had gone rather too far with Mr. Fitzwarine, who appeared lately in very low spirits since her acceptance of Lord Purvis.

"Indeed, my dear Mrs. Seaton," replied Charlotte, "I am well satisfied that Mr. Fitzwarine never entertained the least *penchant*

for me, although at one time I confess to have had serious thoughts of him ; but I very soon discovered that his affections were bestowed elsewhere."

"To whom, then, do you suppose him attached, Charlotte?"

"Why, my dear Mrs. Seaton, it may be, after all, only surmise on my part, but my impression is, from observing his manner towards Florence, that he is decidedly in love with her ; I must, however, say that she has never hinted to me that such was the case, and probably is not aware of it herself."

Mrs. Seaton, thinking it might be a mere fancy of Charlotte's, did not then continue the subject, but after the departure of her guest, she took the opportunity of their being then alone, to question Florence, which drew forth the confession of preferring Hugh to any one she had yet seen. "And is it not natural, dearest mamma," she asked, "I should thus feel towards one who has twice saved my life?"

"It is reasonable, my dear Florence, that you should feel grateful to him, but surely

there is no necessity for falling in love with a man for this impulsive act of kindness to a fellow-being, which the poorest labourer might have offered ; and seriously speaking, my dear child, you must not suffer such romantic ideas to gain ascendancy in your mind, as Mr. Fitzwarine is much too young, and not in a position to think of marrying for some years."

"Then, dearest mamma," enquired Florence, "how could you think him a good match for Charlotte?"

"Very easily, my dear. Charlotte has spent some years of gaiety, and at her age might have thought herself fortunate in marrying any one with a moderate fortune, as she was the eldest daughter, and had a very unhappy home. It is widely different with you; and I trust, on just entering the world, you will not think of seriously encouraging such an imprudent attachment, which, although entertaining a very high opinion of Mr. Fitzwarine, and great friendship for his mother, I could not possibly sanction."

Feeling it difficult to suppress her feelings any longer, poor Florence, without attempting

to make any further reply, silently left her mother's presence, and seeking her own room, there gave way to an uncontrollable burst of anguish, such as she had never felt before,—such as those only can feel who love deeply, and, as they fear, hopelessly. It was the first pang of intense grief she had ever experienced ; and even when relieved by a copious flood of tears, she still sat benumbed, almost paralyzed, by the shock which her mother's last words had given. For a short time bitter disappointment and despair filled her mind, at the wretched prospect before her, when a gleam of sunshine burst through the hitherto dark clouds. Macgregor's words came to her relief—"None may dispute my will," and spoke some comfort to her almost breaking heart. Still Florence doubted his influence over her mother ; and without her full approbation and consent she had resolved never to marry Hugh Fitzwarine.

She had heard through the Middletons of the extraordinary and mysterious bounties of Macgregor, for to none other could they be attributed. If a small struggling farmer had

lost his only horse or cow, or a poor old woman her pig, their value was transmitted to the losers, the agent employed being a sunburnt gipsy man, whose camp lay on the moor, and whose silence on the subject of the donor none could break. To those in distress or want, similar donations found their way, so that there was not a pauper's cot in the village where the hand of Macgregor was not felt, although not known. From these acts of benevolence Florence felt assured that Macgregor would not deceive her or Hugh Fitzwarine, and from his hidden wealth, that he possessed also the power of aiding them in any emergency. His influence over her mother appeared alone doubtful; but the time had now arrived when that must be exerted, or herself and Fitzwarine left to their fate, of being separated, perhaps, for ever.

On Hugh's calling the next day, he found Florence alone, and in tears (Mrs. Seaton having gone to pay a distant visit), when the cause of her grief was soon explained.

"Do not despair, my own dear Florence," he replied, "I have long foreseen some ex-

planation would be required of me, and Macgregor's warning had prepared me for your mother's disapproval of my suit. I will now seek him, without an hour's delay, and tell him all that has occurred. Meet me, I entreat you, once more, to-morrow morning, after breakfast, in the glen; until then, pray keep up your spirits, my beloved Florence, and let us hope for brighter prospects."

With one short, fervent embrace, Hugh tore himself away, and rode rapidly to Macgregor's dwelling. He was at his usual occupation, gardening, when Hugh dismounting, and tying his horse to the gate, approached him with his accustomed deference.

"So, Hugh Fitzwarine," exclaimed the Recluse, "you are come to tell me that Florence Seaton has confessed her love for you to her mother, and that you are, therefore, as I warned you, rejected."

Hugh's utter astonishment at this unexpected disclosure of his own purpose held him speechless and confounded for a few seconds, when he replied—

"It is even as you say, sir—but—"

“You would ask,” said Macgregor, interrupting him, “how I know what passed last evening between mother and daughter? I answer no questions, Hugh Fitzwarine. Now listen—it is well you and Florence have observed so long my injunctions, and she, poor girl, could not refuse to reply to her mother’s interrogatories, suggested by a false, detestable woman, now the wife of that deluded old Peer. Still I admire her discretion in making no further revelations than those positively required. Mrs. Seaton thinks you too young and too poor to espouse her daughter—I think differently. But she is a mercenary woman, and would see her child wedded to wealth and misery, rather than to mediocrity and happiness. I cannot make you older than you are in years, Hugh Fitzwarine, but I can make you richer—rich enough even for Mrs. Seaton. Still, you must earn the money, by a long voyage.—Are you prepared for that?”

“For anything, sir, that may give me Florence Seaton.”

“Well, I do not blame you, she deserves

all you could do to gain her. Now, be attentive to my proposal.—I was once a judge in India, and lived for some years up in the Himalaya Mountains. Business compelled my presence in England ; I left India, thinking soon to return, and buried in a certain spot of my garden there, with my own hands, diamonds and jewels of immense value, given me by a native Prince for rendering him a great service, and planted a small tree over the hidden treasure. That tree still flourishes, bearing my name, which I learnt only a few months since, from an old acquaintance who has succeeded to my office. You saved my life from those murderers.—Those jewels are yours. There are some papers also with them, in a large silver box, of Indian manufacture, which I would not have read by another—I can trust them to you—money and everything shall be provided for your journey there and back.”

Hugh was quite overpowered by Macgregor's kindness, and could scarcely express his gratitude for his great generosity, but begged he might first be allowed to consult

his mother, and he would give him an answer as soon as possible.

“You may trust her and Florence with the object of your journey, on promise of inviolable secrecy—none besides—not Mrs. Seaton, remember Hugh—she shall not know—”

“Your commands shall be strictly obeyed, sir,” replied Hugh; and offering his hand, it was for the first time accepted by Macgregor, with a vice-like pressure, who turned abruptly away.

That same evening, Hugh informed his mother of Mrs. Seaton’s disapproval of his addresses to her daughter, and the munificent offer made him by Macgregor, which by accepting he might then claim the hand of Florence.

At first Mrs. Fitzwarine could not be prevailed upon to listen with complacency to such a project, independent of her misery on being separated from her son for so long a time.

“Oh! Hugh,” she exclaimed, “could you leave your poor mother thus desolate? What

should I do without my own darling, dutiful boy?"

"Say no more, my dearest mother, you know it would almost break my own heart to leave you. No!—it shall not be done—I must give up all thoughts of Florence Seaton."

"I hope, my dear Hugh, I may prevail on Mrs. Seaton to think more favourably of your suit, as you have quite sufficient to make any sensible girl happy as your wife."

"No, my dear mother, not for the world shall you broach this subject to her—promise me you will not, if you love me."

"Well, dear Hugh, do not excite yourself, the subject shall not be even alluded to by me."

"Many thanks for your promise, and, to oblige you, my Indian prospects shall be abandoned."

"Not hastily, my dear son; do not reject Macgregor's offer yet; I will consider it well when more collected."

CHAPTER III.

HUGH found Florence the next morning in the glen, and great was her astonishment on hearing that Macgregor knew beforehand of his rejection by her mother, and almost the very conversation which had passed between them; but greater still was her surprise at the offer of such treasures to Hugh, although she would not think of his leaving her for all the treasures of the East.

“Well, my own dear girl, we have the choice of two evils only, separation for a few months, or, perhaps, final separation. Your mother will not now admit me here on my usual terms of intimacy, and my chances of

meeting you elsewhere are very precarious."

"Still, dear Hugh, it is a comfort to know you are near me."

"It may be so, my precious girl, but what prospect have I of my circumstances being improved? I may spend years in my present position, hoping against hope, and your hand, dearest Florence, given by compulsion, perhaps, to another. That thought is distraction to me. Other young men go to India to work and slave for years, to obtain a competency in old age. One voyage there—one year's absence at farthest, will put me in possession of wealth sufficient to claim you as my own. Oh, Florence, why do you hesitate to let me go?"

"The dread, dear Hugh, of never seeing you again,"—and she burst into tears.

Fitzwarine clasped her in his arms, and said all he could to allay her fears, and at last so far prevailed, that she promised to weigh the matter well in her mind, and give him her answer on the third day from that, hoping in the interval to prevail on her mother to ac-

cede to her wishes. Thus they parted, and in the evening, Mrs. Seaton, again reverting to Hugh Fitzwarine, said, that knowing now his sentiments, she could not for the future permit his visits as before.

“Oh, do not, dearest mamma, be so unkind to one who deserves all gratitude from us both.”

“In kindness to you both, my dear Florence, this step is necessary at present, to prevent worse consequences. You are yet a girl, and he merely a boy, and I know what boys’ love is. You will thank me hereafter for what may appear unkindness now; at least I cannot, will not, permit Mr. Fitzwarine’s addresses to you until one year more has passed over your heads. To oblige you, I did not press your acceptance of Lord Purvis; and to oblige me in turn, you must not press me further in Mr. Fitzwarine’s favour. A twelvemonth hence you will both of you think differently.”

Florence had felt her mother’s forbearance towards her respecting Lord Purvis, and knowing her determination, prudently suppressed any further appeals on her lover’s be-

half, lest a fatal estrangement might be the consequence between their families. At their next meeting Florence (having duly reflected the while) told Hugh she had resolved not to oppose his wishes any further, and related what had passed with her mother.

“ Besides, dear Hugh, I must not let my selfish feelings stand in the way of such an improvement in your worldly circumstances, and the favour of one who seems so inclined to be your friend ; and when you return a richer man, perhaps you may think differently, as mamma says, of your boyish love for Florence Seaton.”

“ Florence,” replied Hugh, solemnly, “ God knows my heart and thoughts, if you will not believe me, and I declare before Him that for you, and you only, do I undertake this voyage to India. I have enough, more than enough, of this world’s goods, to render any reasonable man perfectly contented with his lot. The vow I here made to you shall be religiously observed, and not all the wealth and beauty in the world can ever shake my steadfast, devoted love to you. Oh, Florence ! let no-

thing make you doubt me, or I shall be miserable indeed ; for since Macgregor's impressive benediction, I have ever regarded you as my affianced wife, and ever shall. You alone can break the link by which I am bound."

"That you know, dear Hugh, will never be severed by me, as all my hopes of earthly happiness are centred in yourself; but now tell me when you will be obliged to leave home?"

"That will depend on Macgregor's wishes, and I must have time also, a fortnight or three weeks, to make my own arrangements, and provide a companion for my dear mother during my long absence."

"Ah, poor Mrs. Fitzwarine! it will be a fearful trial for her."

"And yet, dear Florence, she thinks with you that I ought to go; so now, my love, farewell, you shall see me soon again when I have conferred with Macgregor."

On consulting his mysterious friend (for in that light Hugh now considered Macgregor), it was determined that he should take his passage in the first good vessel sailing for India

in October, Macgregor undertaking, through his agent in London, to secure him a good berth, and give him due notice when he must be on board. Hugh then wrote to his oldest friend and fellow-collegian, Ramsey, who had taken orders and recently married, without any preferment save a temporary curacy, which he had just resigned, offering him and his wife a home at the Abbey during his absence, as he was about to leave home for some months, and their respected vicar would be glad of his assistance in his parochial duties, until he could hear of some more lucrative appointment; and in a few days Ramsey, with his young wife (having previously written to accept the invitation), were domiciled in the old Abbey, much to the delight of Hugh and the satisfaction of his mother, who was exceedingly pleased with Mrs. Ramsey's quiet, unassuming manners.

Hugh communicated all that he dare reveal concerning his intended long journey, and said, "Should that prove as satisfactory as I hope, it will then be in my power, my dear Ramsey, to assist you also in pecuniary mat-

ters ; in the meantime, for doing service at the Abbey," he continued, playfully, "you must accept a regular stipend."

"Oh, no, Fitzwarine, that I cannot do."

"Indeed you must and shall, Ramsey, or we shall quarrel at first starting, which I wish to avoid ; so not another word on this subject, if you love me. Now I have a call to make, so take your wife a drive in the pony-carriage."

Not having seen Mrs. Seaton for more than a fortnight, Hugh deemed it advisable to call and inform her of his intended departure from home, merely saying that business of importance required him to undertake a voyage to the East, and that he should be absent some time. This (to her very agreeable news) prevented any allusion being made to his attachment to Florence, Mrs. Seaton thinking of the old saying, that "absence is death to love," and from regard to his mother, she rejoiced at the prospect of this boy and girl attachment expiring of itself, without creating any disagreement or coolness between their parents ; and on learning from him that he must leave in a short time, she was graciously pleased to

invite him to dine at Forest Lodge the next week.

The re-establishment of amity between her mother and Hugh cast a ray of sunshine over the saddened and gloomy thoughts of Florence Seaton, shedding a more cheerful light over the last few days they might be destined perhaps ever to spend together. That last day had at length arrived—the last evening—the last meeting in the glen between the lovers—when, overpowered by her agonised feelings, poor Florence fainted away, and fell senseless in Hugh's arms. On recovering, he gently upbraided her for thus increasing his agony at parting, by witnessing her total prostration of mind.

“Think, my own precious love, think more of my happy return, when, by God's permission, all will be sunshine and joy. Oh, Florence! for my sake, rouse your spirits, or I can never leave you so desponding.”

“Forgive my weakness, dearest Hugh, at this trying moment; I will endeavour to be more composed.”

He then told her of his intention to write

to his mother on every opportunity. "And a letter will also be enclosed for you," he added, "for your own dear self, which Mrs. Ramsey will deliver into your own hands; she may be trusted as the fond wife of my oldest friend. And now, Florence, not to protract this painful meeting, may the Almighty, to whose gracious protection I entrust you, in full reliance on His mercy to restore us again to each other, watch over and shield you from all evil until my return. May God bless and protect you, my own dearest Florence! and now, with one hallowed kiss, let me leave you."

Seeing his violent emotion, Florence made one last effort to subdue her own, and Hugh insisting on watching her from the glen, she turned silently from him, to conceal her fast-falling tears, and on reaching the last spot where her form could be visible, she stood for a few seconds waving her pocket-handkerchief, and then disappeared.

We will draw a veil over the last bitter parting between mother and son, and Mrs. Fitzwarine's pious resignation under this, to her, most severe trial; after which, Hugh

drove off with his friend Ramsey to meet the mail-coach for London.

The fourth morning after his departure Mrs. Fitzwarine received a most affectionate letter from him, enclosing one for Florence, from Southampton, which Mrs. Ramsey took charge of, and her husband intending to make a call at Forest Lodge, set off immediately after breakfast with his wife. After sitting a short time with Mrs. Seaton and her daughter, Mrs. Ramsey expressed a wish to Florence to see the conservatory, and when they were alone, said—

“I am entrusted with a letter for you, dear Miss Seaton, from Mr. Fitzwarine ; and as I can assure you he is quite well, perhaps you had better defer reading it until you reach your own room. Considering my husband his oldest and dearest friend, the secret of your mutual attachment has been confided to him ; and as in our case husband and wife are one, you may rest perfectly satisfied that no consideration on earth could induce me to betray the confidence placed in me, and I trust, on Mr. Fitzwarine’s return, Mrs. Seaton

will no longer withhold her consent to your union ; I think, now, we will return to the house, as I know," with a cheerful smile, " you must be impatient to read your letter."

Florence thanked Mrs. Ramsey for so kindly interesting herself in her welfare, and from that time a mutual friendship sprang up between them. Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey soon took their leave, the former from his quiet, gentlemanly manners, and refined ideas, having already made rapid progress in Mrs. Seaton's good opinion. Florence, when in the retirement of her own room, read Fitzwarine's letter at least a dozen times ; it was the only happy moment she had known since his departure, and when the first transport of delight had passed, on perusing these affectionate and soothing lines, praying her, for his sake and her own, to place her whole trust in God's mercy, for their happy restoration to each other ; she knelt down and prayed also most fervently that he might be preserved from all the perils and dangers awaiting him, and permitted once more to visit his native land. From that hour Florence began to recover her

usual serenity of mind, and every night and morning her devout prayers were offered up to Heaven, for the safety of him who had now become dearer to her than her own life. Mrs. Ramsey had also promised to convey any other letters to her which might be forwarded to Mrs. Fitzwarine, from places where the vessel might touch ; and thus, Florence, being buoyed up by the hope of receiving further intelligence from Hugh, began to feel more cheerful.

CHAPTER IV.

Two months had now elapsed since Hugh Fitzwarine's departure from England, during which the heart of Florence had been gladdened by the receipt of letters from him, all breathing the same feeling of devotion to herself, and humble trust in Providence for their happy reunion, the last containing a postscript, that she must not expect to hear from him again till he reached Calcutta.

Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey had become great favourites with Mrs. Seaton and the neighbouring families, and he proved a very valuable assistant to Mr. Middleton, in taking one half of the Sunday's service off his hands.

In short, being a most eloquent preacher, as well as strictly Christian-like in practice, the church became crowded to excess whenever Mr. Ramsey was expected to preach.

The hitherto dull town of Heddington had been enlivened by two troops of Light Dragoons, for whom the old barracks near that place had been prepared, from apprehension of riots in the north, on account of the dearness of provisions, and want of employment for the poorer classes ; and Major Mercer, being a friend of Colonel Herbert's, had obtained a letter of introduction to Mrs Seaton.

The Major was the reverse of his friend in personal appearance, in stature not exceeding five feet ten, rather slightly formed, and of a dark, swarthy complexion ; yet, withal, a cheerful, pleasant companion, and very agreeable, except on parade or in the barracks, where he could make himself disagreeable enough to the junior officers, who, being mostly young men of good fortune and high connections, were rather disgusted by the Major's strict discipline.

The advent of red coats was the signal for

gaiety, and an invitation was soon sent (at the instigation of his lady) by Lord Lessingham to the Major and the other officers, two of whom were known to the Honourable George, for a dinner party at the Castle, to which succeeded similar ones from other families. The junior officers spent the greater portion of the day, after morning parade, in riding and driving about the country, making calls, and killing time by divers flirtations with the ladies, married or unmarried, to whom they had been introduced. A short dialogue between the two senior Captains on returning from Maesmuir Castle, will best explain how matters stood about a month after their arrival at Heddington.

“Well, Carleton,” asked his friend Mor-daunt, “what think you of the Medwyns? Fine fashionable girls, Carleton, well enough to flirt with, in this confounded dull locality, but evidently hard up for husbands, and on the look-out for flats. The little Major has found a more comfortable and pleasant billet at Forest Lodge, and seems determined to bar his subs out, snubbing every fellow who calls

there when he is present—by Jove! sir, as if he was the only man who had a right to address Miss Seaton; but he shall not bully me *out* of barracks, and that he will find pretty soon; he may have his five thousand a year besides his pay, and so have I, with a Baronetcy in perspective. Then there is that handsome boy, Willoughby, hard at Mrs. Bertie; and if her half-French fool of a husband don't look sharp after her, egad! Carleton, she is not an unlikely one to give him the slip."

"And serve him right, too," added Carleton, "for Bertie is ever flirting with her pretty cousin, and in my opinion treats his wife so badly, that it is no wonder she retaliates by encouraging Willoughby. Take my word for it, Mordaunt, there will be a row at Belvidere some fine morning. By the bye, we all go there to some theatricals to-morrow night, I suppose. Medwyn tells me the last were well got up."

"Oh, no doubt," replied Mordaunt, "these finicking French fellows know how to do such things better than our John Bulls; but my object in going, *inter nos*, as we said at Eton,—

and I don't think you'll blab, old fellow,—is to cut out that little black Major from his monopoly of Miss Seaton, as I intend to have a shy at her myself.”

“Not much money, I am told, in that quarter, Mordaunt.”

“Perhaps not,—but she is exactly to my fancy; and, to confess the truth, I am sick of this parade work, and shall sell out when I can find a girl to suit me as a wife.”

“Well, Mordaunt, she looks like one who would say ‘ay’ to a fine, handsome fellow like yourself, standing six feet without your shoes, and plenty of money also.”

“I grant you, Carleton, her features and sweet smile are almost certain evidence of a kind, affectionate disposition, and I have not the slightest doubt it would occasion a girl of her feelings much pain to refuse any man. But Medwyn tells me she did positively say nay to Hilston, although he persists in denying he proposed; and I bet you five pounds she will give the same short reply to our little Major, if he pops the question.”

The next night, when the theatrical exhi-

bition had closed, during which Major Mercer performed the part of *attaché* to Mrs. and Miss Seaton, Mordaunt, having on a previous occasion obtained an introduction to Florence, asked her hand for the first quadrille, which much annoyed the Major, he not being a dancing man.

In speaking of the places in the neighbourhood, Mordaunt said he had been much gratified with a view of the interior of Stanmore Abbey, kindly permitted by Mrs. Fitzwarine.

“And it is rather singular,” he continued, “that my youngest brother, who sailed in October as a cadet for India, wrote me the other day from the Cape, mentioning he had received the greatest kindness from a fellow-passenger of the same name, who had treated him like a brother during their voyage.”

Florence felt her face burn on hearing these words, but fortunately a turn in the figure prevented her partner from observing her confusion.

“I presume,” continued Mordaunt, “that gentleman is the son of Mrs. Fitzwarine, as I am told he has left home for the East.”

“I believe so,” Florence replied, who had now recovered her self-possession.

“It is very fortunate for my brother to have met with so kind a friend, as he is only seventeen; and if they fall in with a homeward-bound vessel, I daresay I shall hear more about him.”

By what trifles are we often influenced in our feelings towards utter strangers! The fact of Mordaunt’s brother being a fellow-passenger with Fitzwarine became at once a passport to Florence’s favour. It was a consolation to her to know that Hugh had found a friendly companion even in a boy during his passage over that mighty expanse of waters, who might be a comfort to him in his solitude; and her beaming smile spoke (although unintelligibly to Mordaunt from what cause) the friendly feeling she began to entertain towards himself, for being the brother of Fitzwarine’s young friend across the seas.

Florence was anxious to know more about the passage to India, what places the vessel would stop at, how soon it would reach Calcutta, and other particulars of the country,

travelling through it, &c. ; on which Captain Mordaunt, having a married sister there, was proceeding to give her full information, when, the quadrille being ended, he said, with a bow,—

“If you will honour me, Miss Seaton, with a second dance later in the evening, I will finish my description of Indian life, of which my sister writes me in such raptures.”

Florence could not resist the temptation of hearing more about the land in which Hugh would soon become a wayfarer, and bowed her assent, for which the Captain expressed his thanks.

Now, Florence being decidedly the most ladylike and engaging girl in the room, as well as the prettiest, she had no lack of partners ; and Captain Carleton, having overheard her consent to dance a second time with Mordaunt, thought to obtain a similar favour, which, however, much to his chagrin, was refused ; so that it was settled at breakfast the following morning that Mordaunt was to be the favoured man, which caused the Major to look extremely black—much blacker than usual.

“I say, Mordaunt !” exclaimed Carleton, when the Major had left the room, “you will be put under arrest the first fitting opportunity, and confined to barracks, my boy, for dancing twice with Miss Seaton last night !”

“Major Mercer had better be careful how he vents his ill-humour on me, Carleton ; and to show you I don’t care a rap for him, I shall drive over to Forest Lodge this afternoon, and repeat my visits as long as I find them well received.”

The Major, having the same visit in contemplation, had scarcely been seated in the drawing-room ere Mordaunt made his appearance there also, who, notwithstanding the frowns of his superior officer, persisted in maintaining his position, until the Major rose in a pet to take leave ; and Mordaunt, perceiving his purpose, resolved to prevent any further *tête-à-têtes* with Florence. With this intent he desired his groom every afternoon, when the Major’s cab was ordered, to watch which road he took when leaving the barrack-yard, as the two turnings, the one to Forest Lodge and the other to the Castle, were

within a hundred yards of the gates, and every time the former was chosen, Mordaunt took the same, although by a shorter track-way on horseback, so that he generally reached the Lodge first.

The little Major's annoyance at being thus balked by his Captain was very perceptible, and to prevent a recurrence of these unpleasant interruptions, he gave orders, under the pretence that the morning exercise was not sufficient for the horses, that both troops should have two extra hours, from two till four o'clock in the afternoon. Mordaunt knew the meaning of this; and one afternoon, hearing the Major was going to call at the Castle, he shirked duty, hoping to spend an agreeable hour in the society of Miss Seaton. His surprise may, therefore, be imagined when, during a most delightful conversation with that young lady and her mother, the door opened to admit Major Mercer. The Major looked thunder-clouds, and the Captain a trifle discomposed on being found absent from duty without leave; and seeing the storm brewing, thought it most prudent

to vacate his seat near Miss Seaton almost immediately after.

On the Major's return, a polite intimation was conveyed to Mordaunt, that he was to consider himself restricted to barracks during the Major's pleasure. This being a very indefinite term, which might be prolonged to suit the Major's views, Mordaunt, through his friend Carleton, who was acquainted with a tradesman's daughter in the town, got a letter written by that young lady, in a disguised hand, and transmitted through the post to Mrs. Seaton, informing her that a certain Major, who visited frequently at Forest Lodge, was the papa of five small children, who lived with their mamma under the name of Mrs. Morris, at a neat little villa called Albion Place, half a mile outside the city of York, on the Great Northern Road, where full information as to the truth of the statement might be obtained.

Mrs. Seaton had no particular wish to have the Major as a son-in-law, although she liked him as an agreeable acquaintance; in fact, she thought the Captain a far more desirable

connection in every respect ; and, therefore, deemed it advisable to give her daughter a hint that the Major was reported to have been a very gay man (which term, I believe, is understood among ladies to mean anything but what he *ought* to be). By Florence, however, who cared no more about the Major than one of his sergents, this intelligence was received with the utmost indifference.

Mrs. Seaton had rather encouraged the officer's visits at first, solely with the hope of diverting Florence's thoughts from Hugh Fitzwarine ; and her improvement in spirits and cheerfulness induced her to believe that absence was gradually performing its work ; and from her inquiries respecting Captain Mordaunt, whose attentions had of late become very particular, she felt inclined to favour his addresses to her daughter.

Now, although present objects and present company may occupy our attention for the time being, to the exclusion of absent ones, the thought of absent ones, if endeared to our memory, recur to our minds when left in solitude for the night ; and they become then

our companions in imagination, as much as those of the day have proved in reality. Before laying her head down to rest, Florence every night offered up a prayer for Hugh's safety and restoration, which realized his image to her mind; and during the still hours of darkness, when her body lay motionless on her couch, the ever-wakeful spirit was winging its flight over seas and foreign lands, holding communion with him she loved. She was sitting with him in his lonely cabin, enjoying sweet converse together, whilst the winds were howling around them, and the fierce waves lashing in their fury the sides of the rocking ship. They were again, on his return home, renewing their vows in the glen, where Macgregor had first joined their hands together; and at the altar, where she had seen Charlotte Norman kneel, she knelt with Hugh Fitzwarine. From these happy visions she woke to the dread reality. Hugh was gone from her, perhaps for ever. Still hope whispered, "Let not thy faith waver in the overruling power and mercy of God, and these dreams of happiness shall be realities." With

these feelings she looked forward with pleasure to the approach of night, as the time when, although in imagination only, she might hold converse with her lover.

It cannot be supposed, therefore, that Florence Seaton ever intended to give the slightest encouragement to Captain Mordaunt, although inclined to be on more intimate terms with him, from his brother being Hugh's companion, as well as from his quiet, gentlemanly demeanour towards herself.

Women cannot understand why they may not prefer one man as an acquaintance or friend above others, because more agreeable or pleasing, without the unfair inference being drawn that they must of necessity be in love with him; and it must be admitted that, in this respect, the opposite sex do jump at most unwarrantable conclusions. If a girl accept a man twice as a partner at a ball, and receive his after-attentions with a good-humoured smile, he begins to flatter himself with having made a favourable impression upon her heart, when that heart may be engaged to another. Such, however, is the overweening vanity of

our sex, in no wise inferior to that of woman. Captain Mordaunt would persist in believing he had gained already, or was in the high road to gain, the affections of Florence ; so thought his friend Carleton ; and being very irate with the Major for confining him to barracks, the two friends resolved to play him a trick. For this purpose Carleton penned a letter, nicely written in a prim old style, purporting to come from an eccentric old spinster lady living at Charlton, on the verge of the moors, some nine or ten miles from Heddington, and containing an invitation to Major Mercer to dine with her, on a certain day named, to meet some of the neighbouring families.

This deceptive epistle was carried by Carleton to the aforesaid village, and there by him dropped into the letter-box unperceived by any one. The bait was eagerly taken by the Major, who, supposing the owner of Charlton House, from which it was dated, to be some wealthy, highly respectable old dowager, the invitation was, of course, accepted, and a polite note sent in reply, with Major Mercer's compliments, saying he would have the honour

of waiting upon Miss Lindsay on Saturday next, at six o'clock. Now the consternation of Miss Rebecca Lindsay, on receiving this announcement of the Major's visit, may be more readily conceived than depicted, and the purport of it was wholly unintelligible to one of her age and retired habits. What on earth could Major Mercer want with her? She had always, it was true, held Jacobite opinions; her great-grandfather had fought and fallen in the cause of the Pretender; and she still cherished certain prejudices against the Guelph family. Sure the times of persecution on that score had long since passed. Still she entertained some old-womanish apprehensions from this visit of a Major of dragoons.

CHAPTER V.

THE Major, being not only close-fisted but also close-mouthed, keeping his own counsel, did not condescend to make further inquiries as to Miss Lindsay's place of residence, except by asking his groom if he knew Charlton House.

"I knows the road to Charlton village, sir," replied the man—"about nine miles from barracks."

"Very well—that will do. Have my cab ready at half-past four this afternoon."

Great was the merriment of Mordaunt and Carleton on watching their little Major set out on this hopeful expedition. For five miles

the road was tolerably good and level, along which the Major bowled at a rapid pace. It then became more hilly and tortuous, and the last ascent to the village, for about a mile, very steep, so that they had a full view of all before them.

"I don't see any mansion hereabouts," the Major remarked to his groom.

"No more don't I, sir, unless that be it on yonder hill; that looks, sir, like a large building of some sort, and there's nothing else I can see, far or near, like a gentleman's seat."

"Oh, that's it, no doubt," replied the Major, not condescending to ask questions of the few ragged boys they met in the village. Now came the tug of war for the poor horse. The road became exceedingly narrow, the ruts uncomfortably deep, and the ascent improving to nearly the declivity of a house-roof.

"Gad, sir!" exclaimed the Major to his groom, whose little round body had been nearly rolled out of the cab by a sudden lurch, "take care what you are about in these infernal ruts—we must go quietly."

"No doubt about that, sir," replied Sam,

“there aren’t no choice in the matter, sir. I only hopes we shall meet no wehicle a-coming down the hill, or we must bide here all night.”

Fortunately no such obstruction impeded their snail’s pace until they emerged from the narrow pass in full view of the large building, which for the last mile had been invisible from the high bank on the left side of the road.

“D—— it, sir!” exclaimed the peppery little Major, his patience utterly exhausted, “this is a huge barn—where the devil is Charlton House?”

“Can’t say, sir,” replied Sam; “but I’ll just step in and enquire at the farm.”

“And ask where that confounded old woman, Miss Lindsay, lives,” added his master.

“What name, sir?”

“Lindsay, you fool!” roared the Major.

“Why, sir, I wish you’d a told me that afore, as there’s an old lady of that name lives in the village we come through.”

“Miss Lindsay, of Charlton House,” again shouted the Major, as Sam was trudging away.

"I ain't deaf," muttered that individual, losing his temper, as well as his master.

The information derived from the stout, buxom farm maid-servant confirmed Sam's suspicions. The only Miss Lindsay known in those parts was the old lady residing in Charlton village. The girl had never heard of such a place as Charlton House.

"There, sir," said Sam, returning to his master, "'tis just as I 'spected; there aren't no other of that name hereabouts, except that 'ere Miss Lindsay down yonder in the village, and I know'd there wasn't afore axing."

"Then why the devil didn't you tell me this before dragging me up this infernal hill?" enquired the Major, red hot with passion and the prospect of losing his dinner, it being now half-past six o'clock.

"If you'd asked where Miss Lindsay lived, sir, in course I should have told you long afore; but all you wanted to know was about Charlton House, which I said at first I never heard of."

"Get up, sir!" roared the Major, "there's

a d——d piece of folly somewhere between us."

"'Tain't mine, Major, nor the 'osses," retorted Sam, very sulkily.

"None of your impudence, sir," growled the Major.

"None wasn't meant, sir," returned Sam, as he vented his anger on the horse with a sharp cut of the whip, which caused such a jerk, on the wheel suddenly rising from the deep rut, that master and man were both capsized at the bound, the Major rolling like a football down the grassy road-side bank into a ditch below, and Sam fortunately shot like a trapped toad on to the horse's neck, from which, still holding the reins, he scrambled down unhurt except on the nose. Not so well fared the Major, who, his knee being injured in his rapid descent, came limping up the hill, swearing like a trooper at Sam, who stood quietly awaiting the charge.

"I'll discharge you instantly when I reach barracks, you insolent blackguard," roared the Major, "and you may get your character where you can."

"What for, sir?" asked Sam, very demurely touching his hat.

"For throwing me out of the cab on purpose, sir."

"Then I suppose I throwed myself out a purpose, sir, to get this bloody nose and spoil my best vestcoat."

"You *shall* go," screamed the Major, "and without a character, too."

"Very well, Major, just as you pleases about going and character. Well, I won't be so hard as you be, for I'll give you a character to the lady's maid at Forest Lodge, and the young lady may not like you the worse for having a little family ready provided. I've been a good and faithful servant to you, sir, for ten years, and there ain't no hosses in the regiment can beat Major Mercer's; but I won't be abused and discharged without a character for nothing at all."

"Well, Sam, I must admit you have been a good servant to me," replied the Major, quite mollified, "but these roads are enough to make any man out of temper."

"And a hoss too, sir," added Sam; "but

let me wipe the dirt off your coat, and I hope you ain't much hurt, sir, about the knee?"

Differences being thus amicably settled between master and man, they soon after drew up at the little wicket gate of Miss Lindsay's abode, which stood in the street, there being no apparent approach to the house save by a small gravel-path. There, leaving the cab with instructions to Sam to put up the horse at a small public-house below, the Major limped up to the front door, giving a pull at the bell, which caused considerable commotion within, a pet dog barking with all his might, and a parrot screaming ditto. The door being opened at length by a thin servant-maid, the Major enquired if Miss Lindsay lived there.

"Yes, sir," was the reply; "please to walk into the parlour, sir;" into which he was accordingly shown.

"Things don't look like a dinner-party here," muttered the Major; "not room to swing a cat. Neighbouring families, indeed! Egad, sir! the whole house would not contain half a family!"

After fussing and fuming about this small apartment, like a caged lion, for a quarter of an hour, the door opened, and a little old woman made her appearance, dressed in very antique fashion, to whom the Major, making his bow, said he presumed he had the honour of addressing Miss Lindsay.

“My name, sir, is Lindsay,” was the stiff reply. “May I beg to know yours, and your business with me?”

His card was produced, and the information that he had waited on Miss Lindsay by invitation to dine with her that evening.

“I invite you to dine with me, Major Mercer!” exclaimed the lady, in utter amazement; “I never should have thought of such a thing!”

“Here is your note, madam,” said the Major, producing that received, and handing it to her to read.

“Charlton House!” continued Miss Lindsay, reading, “this is not Charlton House, but Prospect Place, and certainly it is not my handwriting.”

“Very extraordinary, madam,” replied the Major.

“Still more extraordinary, sir,” added the lady, bridling up, “if I did not know the name of my own house, and my own handwriting.”

“I did not presume, madam, to question your word, but it is very extraordinary from whom this invitation could proceed. I can hear of no other lady bearing your name in this neighbourhood.”

“Well, Major,” replied Miss Lindsay, now assured of no unpleasant business, and feeling also for his disappointment, “there must be some great mistake somewhere; but the tray has only just been removed—can I offer you a cup of tea, as I always dine at two o’clock?”

“Thank you, madam, but I never take tea.”

“Some sandwiches, then, and a glass of home-made gooseberry wine, which my neighbours say is equal to champagne?”

Miss Lindsay was with reason very proud of this beverage, which, in truth, far surpassed half the decoctions palmed upon the public as the veritable wines of that peculiar district.

That, the Major thinking it would play old gooseberry with him, was also politely declined; and apologizing for his intrusion, the crest-fallen Major bolted hastily from the house, followed by the cur snarling and snapping at his heels, and the parrot screaming in concert. His cab was instantly ordered out, and when free of the village, the trick played upon him was divulged to Sam.

“Ay, sir, I thought there were summat very strange about this Charlton House—but, sir, you must want your dinner uncommon,” (Sam did too a glass or so of beer), “so I’m thinking you can get a good mutton chop at the Fox and Goose, four miles on, for it won’t do, sir, you know, going into barracks just yet, arter saying you dined out, or them youngsters will have the laugh agin us.”

This being precisely the Major’s opinion, Sam’s suggestion was approved of and adopted.

The next day, the Major was also confined to barracks, with a swelled knee, and it became at last so painful that leeches were applied; rest for a few days on the sofa

being recommended by the surgeon ; and, although suspecting by whom this hoax had been played, he followed Solomon's advice, and, like a prudent man, concealed the matter. Until able himself to get about, however, he would not permit Mordaunt to leave barracks.

On his reappearance at Forest Lodge, the Major was received very formally, which means rather coolly, by Mrs. Seaton, though in Florence he could discern no difference of manner, from the simple cause that she was always perfectly indifferent about him ; and as guilty consciences need no accusers, the Major at once suspected that another little note had perhaps been despatched to her, giving some information as to a certain person residing at Albion Place, near the city of York. However, as Forest Lodge had proved a most agreeable lounge or place of resort to him, he had not the slightest intention of coming to any misunderstanding with the fair inmates during his sojourn at Heddington, especially as Lord Lessingham had now left Maesmuir Castle with his family. Mordaunt

also, though now at liberty, believing he had stopped the Major's career, avoided meeting him there for some few days; but Carleton sometimes paid a short morning call, to ascertain, if possible, how his superior was progressing; and finding Florence alone one day, he ventured to ask her opinion of their little Major.

"Really," replied Florence, "I can express no opinion of Major Mercer, except that he appears very agreeable."

"Everywhere except in barracks, Miss Seaton, where he is exceedingly disagreeable; and you may judge of his bad temper, by putting Mordaunt under arrest, merely for riding over here one day, instead of riding out with his troop for exercise."

"Well, perhaps that was rather harsh treatment."

"Don't you think Mordaunt very handsome, Miss Seaton?"

"Not very," she replied, with a smile.

"Well, I am surprised you don't think so as he is considered the best-looking fellow in the regiment, and wherever we go

the young ladies are all falling in love with him."

"Indeed," said Florence, with the same quiet smile.

"And here, also," continued Carleton, "we all thought he had already made a decided conquest."

"Not improbable, if he is so irresistible," replied Florence, in a careless tone.

"Can't you guess who the young lady is?" enquired Carleton.

"I have not the least idea, Captain Carleton—perhaps one of the Miss Medwyns."

"No," replied Carleton, "she resides much nearer the barracks than Maesmuir Castle, and danced twice with Mordaunt on her first introduction to him at Mr. Bertie's theatricals."

Florence, slightly blushing at this allusion to herself, and perceiving now the Captain's meaning, said, very gravely—

"It is rather unfair, I think, for a gentleman to presume on such an act as authorizing him to draw the most erroneous conclusions. Young ladies may prefer one partner at a ball

to others, because more entertaining, without any other kind of preference, I suppose, Captain Carleton?"

"Oh, certainly, Miss Seaton, but preferences openly shown by young ladies receiving them alone when they call, go for something in men's opinions."

"And for very little in ladies'," replied Florence; "but if military men are so unreasonable, they must be kept at a greater distance."

Fortunately at this moment Mrs. Seaton entered the room, and Florence made her escape, resolving for the future to avoid seeing any of the officers alone when they called, as it was evident, from Captain Carleton's remarks, that an impression prevailed among them that she had given encouragement to Captain Mordaunt, which annoyed her exceedingly; and she began to reflect on her imprudence in dancing twice with him, merely in the hope of hearing more about Hugh Fitzwarine; and being found alone by him once or twice when he called, this might be construed also into her approval of his visits.

There are few things more abhorrent to a modest girl than the bare supposition of her throwing out a lure to attract any man, even him whom she really does love; but to be suspected, like Charlotte, of trying to engage a stranger's attentions, filled her mind with horror. She had been obliged often by her mother to receive visitors when she was otherwise engaged, but to be made the subject of such unfounded remarks, amongst a set of young men at their mess table, was more than she could bear. The more Florence thought of Captain Carleton's insinuations, the greater became her annoyance at them, and on her mother afterwards making some allusion to him, she told her that she had felt so mortified by some of his remarks about receiving the officers sometimes alone when they called, that she would never be at home again to one of them if she was engaged.

"I will not be accused, dear mamma, of throwing out lures to attract any one here, nor be set down as a flirt, like Charlotte Norman."

"Well, my dear child," replied Mrs. Sea-

ton, "you must not attend to all these boys may say—half, perhaps, in joke."

"Perhaps not, mamma ; but you would not wish me to be talked of, at their mess, as a girl ready to fall in love with one of them before I had known him a week?"

"Certainly not, my love ; but I should scarcely think any gentleman would speak thus of you."

"One has hinted as much, dear mamma, and for the future I would rather remain in my room the whole day than ever again receive these officers alone."

Mrs. Scaton having nothing to urge against this prudent resolution, and knowing Florence would not have spoken so firmly without good reason, said she could of course do as she liked, and Florence told old Donald forthwith to say Miss Scaton was not at home to any of the officers for the future.

"Awcel, Miss, I'm unco glad to hear ye say so, for I dinna like, my dear young leddy to be speered at by these flashy red coats, who are always making free with every lassie they meet."

“They shall not make free with me, Donald; so mind you don’t show them in when I am alone.”

“Dinna fash about it, Miss Florence, I ken what ye mean.”

And on seeing Mordaunt riding up the next morning, old Donald, before going to the hall door, peeped into the drawing-room, to apprize Florence of his visit, who immediately left by another door.

“Is Mrs. Seaton at home?” asked Mordaunt.

“I dinna ken,” replied the old man, “but I’ll inquire.”

“Miss Seaton is, I conclude?”

“Na, sir, Miss Seaton is not at home, o’ that I am sure.”

“Indeed,” said the Captain; “I could almost have sworn I saw her at the drawing-room window as I rode up the drive.”

“Ye are mistaken, Captain; my young leddy is not there.”

“Oh! very well; give my compliments to Mrs. Seaton, and I’ll call again;” with which Mordaunt mounted his horse and rode away;

and receiving the same answer every day he called — ditto Major — ditto Carleton — the latter began to suspect that Miss Seaton was not one of the girls to fall desperately in love with a boiled lobster at first sight. The Major looked black, the Captain brown, at these rebuffs, which Carleton at last explained by relating their conversation the last time he met Florence, remarking, —

“By Jove, Mordaunt, the whole troop is sent to Coventry by this mettlesome girl!”

“By your confounded fooling!” added Mordaunt, “and I wish to Heavens, Carleton, you would mind your own business for the future, and not meddle in mine!”

“I thought to do you a service, Mordaunt, in trying to ascertain her sentiments towards you; and most girls would have only laughed at my remarks, or felt flattered by them.”

“Very likely, Carleton, but Miss Seaton is not like most girls one meets with — flirting and coquetting with every red-coat thrown in their way — or I had never thought seriously about her.”

“Well, Mordaunt, then tell me how I can help you out of the scrape my folly has occasioned.”

“I must now help myself, Carleton; and that she may not believe me merely intending to play the fool or the flirt with her, I have no other means of explanation but by writing to Mrs. Seaton, and stating my real feelings towards her daughter. That is all I can do now, for it is very clear to me, until this explanation is given, I have no chance of again seeing Miss Seaton.”

“This is what the lawyers call *precipitating matters* very suddenly, Mordaunt.”

“It cannot be avoided, although I wished for rather more time to make a sure game, and I fear my throw now will be a failure.”

“Then you will be a fool to make it, Mordaunt! So take my advice, and let things remain as they are, and you may get on terms again by meeting her somewhere else.”

CHAPTER VI.

MORDAUNT, however, thought differently, and that same evening wrote to Mrs. Seaton, expressing his true sentiments towards her daughter, with a full account of his present position as to money affairs and prospects for the future, and concluded by soliciting her and Miss Seaton's permission to continue his visits at Forest Lodge, in the hope of eventually obtaining the young lady's favourable consideration,—the letter being penned in the most courteous and deferential terms.

On receipt of it next morning through the post, Mrs. Seaton carefully perused it, and

then handed it to Florence, saying, with a smile,—

“You will now see, my love, that Captain Mordaunt is not the flirt he has been represented.”

Florence immediately guessed from her mother's looks and words the nature of this communication, and after hastily scanning it, returned the letter to her mother without a remark, her varying colour alone betraying her thoughts, at first by a deep blush, and then by as sudden pallor.

“Well, my dearest child,” inquired Mrs. Seaton, “what reply shall I give to Captain Mordaunt?”

“Knowing my present feelings, dearest mamma, what answer can you expect I should give?”

“Indeed, my dear Florence! I had hoped and believed, from your returning cheerfulness, that your first imprudent preference had given place to more sober reflections on the folly you had committed by ever allowing such a foolish fancy to take possession of your mind. You know my disapprobation of Mr. Fitzwa-

rine is on account of his youth and inadequate means; and you may rest assured his boyish love will soon be transferred to some other pretty girl he meets on his travels, if it is not already. Absence in his case will, you may depend, prove death to love."

"I think differently, dear mamma, and that he will return with unaltered feelings, but I trust with greatly altered and improved means."

"Diamonds and pearls are not picked up so easily as you imagine in India, my love; and this gift, or legacy from his friend, may prove, after all, barely sufficient to pay his expenses there and back; so it would be folly to build your hopes on such a frail foundation. Young persons are always too sanguine in their expectations about everything; but when you have reached my time of life you will see things in their proper light. Even Charlotte thought with dread of being immured in that dismal old Abbey, like a nun in a cloister, shut out from all intercourse with the world; and the sacrifice you would contemplate making to this young man, who has no other

pursuit than farming and shooting, is something quite mournful to think of ; indeed, my dearest child, I advise you, as your best friend, to give up all thoughts of it, and you will, I know, thank me ever afterwards for saving you from such a wretched fate. You are formed for society, and enjoy it ; and a girl of your accomplishments and beauty ought to make some good connection, with wealth sufficient to afford you all the pleasures and comforts of life."

" I do not agree with Charlotte, mamma, in any of her ideas, neither do I consider the Abbey such a dismal, frightful place ; and Captain Mordaunt said he preferred it to Maesmuir Castle,—so that I am not singular in this opinion ; and as to Mr. Fitzwarine, you must have perceived his appreciation of good society ; and the kind reception he meets with everywhere is the surest proof of the high estimation in which he is held."

" I have no wish to say anything in disparagement of his good qualities, my dear child, which are known to all in this neighbourhood ; but that he is too young, and too poor

to marry, admits of no doubt,—so we will dismiss the subject,—and I may conclude the answer I am to send to Captain Mordaunt.”

“Under any circumstances, dearest mamma, although liking him very well as an acquaintance and partner at a ball, I should not select him as a partner for life.”

“Very well, Florence, I see you are resolved to throw away every offer of an advantageous connection. Of course I must send a civil reply to Captain Mordaunt;”—saying which, she rose and left the room; and being annoyed at what she called Florence’s obstinacy, the reply sent amounted to this: “That her daughter, to whom she had imparted the contents of his letter, could not be prevailed upon, from her short acquaintance with Captain Mordaunt, to receive him on any other terms than those of a friend, but that she should be happy to see him as before at Forest Lodge.”

Expecting a flat refusal, Mordaunt felt relief from the kindly-expressed letter of Mrs. Seaton, and hoping on longer acquaintance he might still be able to win the affections of her

daughter, he called the next day to express in person the obligations he felt under for her very friendly letter, at the same time confessing his want of discretion in making so early an avowal of his feelings towards Miss Seaton. "I am aware," he continued, "that my proposals must appear very abrupt; but I could not bear the idea of being considered a mere flirt, as I fear Carleton represented me; and therefore, my dear madam, I trust Miss Seaton will take this into consideration, and still receive me as a friend."

"For that, Captain Mordaunt, I think I can answer, provided no allusion is made to what has now passed."

On returning from a walk, Florence was not a little surprised to hear from Donald that the Captain had paid a visit to her mother of nearly an hour; but her surprise was great indeed a few days after, when he was again ushered into the drawing-room, where she was sitting with her mother at her usual occupation of embroidery. Her embarrassment, on first meeting the man she had just rejected, may be imagined, although, on his approach

to offer his hand, she did not draw back ; but a feeling of a different kind succeeded ; and the thought immediately occurred, that her mother's reply to his proposal must have been a very civil one indeed, if not ambiguous, to justify these renewed visits. Fully intent, apparently, on the frame before her, she continued working on, returning only short replies to his questions, until he took his leave, when, without making a single remark to Mrs. Seaton, Florence also retired to her own room, when, after due reflection, she determined to say nothing to her mother on the subject, in the fear of some further unpleasantness, but to pursue the course she had previously adopted of never receiving any one of the officers again by herself.

We must now turn our attention to what was passing at Belvidere, where young Willoughby's frequent visits and flirtations with his wife were beginning to excite Mr. Bertie's suspicions. Many games are very amusing, when we have the chief amusement to ourselves, or, in other words, hold winning cards ; and many have little disinclination to sport

with the feelings of others who do not like others to sport with theirs.

Bertie flirted audaciously with his wife's cousin, always calling her by her Christian name, and treating her even at his own table with such familiarity as to excite the disgust of the man standing behind his chair. If the dinner did not please him, remarks were made on Mrs. Bertie's ignorance of the *cuisine* department; and being more vexatious than usual on one occasion, he said openly, "Really, Julia, I must ask you to order dinner for the future, as your taste is so far superior to your cousin's in such matters."

On hearing this cutting speech, aggravated by previous insults, Mrs. Bertie rose from her chair, and was leaving the room, when her husband called out, "Resume your seat, madam, I insist."

"I will not resume it, sir," she replied, turning indignantly towards him, "to be insulted by you before my own servants. I have borne too much already."

Bertie, springing up instantly, caught her by the arm, just as she reached the door,

exclaiming, "You *shall* resume your seat, madam," and was dragging her back in his fury towards the table, when her own footman, who had lived previously in her father's service, resolutely stood before him, saying, "You shall not ill-treat my young mistress, sir, in this manner. Let go her arm."

"You, you miscreant!" screamed Bertie, now white with passion, "how dare you interfere between me and my wife?"

"I *will* interfere," replied John Steadman, "to protect her from your brutal treatment;" and seizing his master's arm, he disengaged his hand as easily as he would a child's by his powerful grasp from Mrs. Bertie's, who fell fainting on the floor.

"Turn that fellow out of the room," roared Bertie to the other servants, disregarding his wife's position.

"Let any man touch me who dares," said John to the Swiss butler and French valet; and raising his young mistress in his arms, he carried her from the room.

Having left her to the care of her maid, John Steadman re-entered the room, which

he was ordered by Bertie to leave directly, and his house also.

"That I shall do to-morrow morning," replied the stalwart footman, "and report to my old master your brutal behaviour to his daughter and your bad goings on in other ways."

"You will, will you?" demanded Bertie, turning scarlet.

"Yes, sir, I will; and I knows rather more about your sly tricks and foreign fashions than what you fancies." Then, surveying his master with a steady, meaning look, at which the other shrank, he walked leisurely from the room.

Miss Arundel even was shocked at the scene which had just occurred, and whispered Bertie, by whose side she always sat at dinner, "You have been too violent."

"*You* say so, Julia?" he asked, in an under tone.

"Yes," was the reply, "and mean what I say."

Mrs. Bertie did not make her appearance down stairs that evening, and as, in conformity

with another French fashion, husband and wife now occupied different sleeping apartments, no reconciliation took place that night ; in short, from her husband's disgusting behaviour to her, and his late unprovoked insult, she had now resolved on a legal separation from him, or to leave his roof.

The whole of the next day being passed in her own room, the cowardly mongrel (whom she had at the altar sworn to love, honour, and obey, without the knowledge at that time that it would be utterly impossible for her to observe those vows), considering that she had lately succeeded to a large sum of money left her by an aunt, and wholly restricted from her husband's interference, deemed it prudent to make an offer of reconciliation with his greatly injured wife. The offer was accepted on one condition, that Julia Arundel should leave Belvidere ; which being acceded to, the wound was patched up for the present—not healed ; but Bertie deferred Julia's departure, although he flirted no longer with her before his wife. Mrs. Bertie's case was that of thousands of unsuspecting girls.

She had fancied herself in love with Bertie. He was handsome—agreeable—sang charmingly—and was extremely fond of music. So was she. She never took the trouble to inquire into his true character or disposition, although warned by her aunt that a person of his foreign ideas on marriage never could prove a good husband. She must have learnt from his conversation that he was a man of little morality and less religion; but she would not be taught—she would not believe anything against him. He was charming—delightful—fascinating. She *would* marry him. Well, she *did* marry him, and the spell was broken. He had never been in love with her; for, like Solomon (if passion can be called by that name), he loved “strange women;” but he married her, first for her fortune, secondly for her connections, and lastly for her beauty.

A woman must follow her husband—she must follow his fancies also—she must submit to his ideas, and yield to his passions, however gross, however degrading—or rebel against him. In thought, Mrs. Bertie did

rebel against her husband after marriage, but in act she was obliged to submit.

Lieutenant Willoughby had now become a constant visitor at Belvidere—neither did Bertie discourage his visits. He dined there often—sometimes slept there. He sang duets with his wife—rode with her when the weather permitted—so did Bertie with Julia Arundel. Mrs. Bertie was at first annoyed at her prolonged stay. That feeling had now passed away. She cared less about her, or her flirtations with her husband. Her woman's pride was roused. She retaliated by flirting with Willoughby. He was but a boy—still he would suit her purpose. Such were her feelings then. Slippery is the downward path; and few can determine, when their foot is first placed thereon, "*Thus far will I go, and no further.*"

CHAPTER VII.

MATTERS were thus progressing at Belvidere, when one morning old Donald rushed into the breakfast-room at Forest Lodge, saying, "Gude save us all, my Leddy! but the bank has failed at Heddington."

"Good heavens! Donald," exclaimed Mrs. Seaton, "surely this cannot be true?"

"Ah! but it is ower true, my led dy. The postman brought word that Messrs. Franklyn stopped payment yester noon."

Mrs. Seaton, although almost thunderstruck by this unexpected news, restrained herself before her old servant from saying more; but when he had left the room, turning to Flo-

rence, said, "Alas! my poor child, if this is true, we are half ruined. The five thousand pounds transferred into that bank by Mr. Chaffman's advice are gone!"

"Let us hope for the best, dearest mamma. Perhaps this is a mere idle report."

They had scarcely finished breakfast, however, before Chaffman was announced, by whom the report was confirmed.

"Then I conclude, sir," said Mrs. Scaton, in a sharp tone, "that the money you so strongly advised and urged me to place in this bank is entirely lost?"

"Oh! no, my dear madam—only a little temporary suspension of business. That is all, I assure you. In fact, as I before informed you, I have also a large sum of money in Messrs. Franklyn's hands. They, or rather Mr. Franklyn, is a man of good landed property, and his estate will pay twenty shillings in the pound. A sudden run on his bank, with not sufficient cash in hand to meet these pressing calls, my dear madam; and I dare say it will re-open in a few days."

Having thus thrown oil on the troubled

waters, Mr. Chaffman pleaded urgent business as an excuse for his short visit, saying he would call again in a few days, when he had ascertained more about this very unpleasant business, and how matters were likely to be arranged.

The next day, John Newman called at Forest Lodge, with the astounding intelligence that the two Messrs. Franklyn had been arrested that morning on a charge of embezzling a sum of ten thousand pounds.

"Can this really be true, Mr. Newman?" asked Mrs. Seaton, almost gasping for breath from excessive agitation.

"Indeed I am sorry to say that it is too true," replied Newman; "since I have just returned from Heddington; and my few hundred pounds, generally left in the bank to meet any sudden calls, are, I fear, quite swept away. The consternation in the town and country also is quite appalling. Hundreds will be entirely ruined, for all anticipate the worst; and one of the leading tradesmen in Heddington told me this morning, they could not pay three shillings in the pound."

"Oh! then, Mr. Newman," exclaimed Mrs. Seaton, "I shall sustain a most serious loss, having a large sum in their bank."

"I am indeed distressed to hear you say so, my dear madam; but it is impossible at present to ascertain the exact truth, when so many rumours are afloat. I shall, however, attend the preliminary investigation into this charge preferred against the Messrs. Franklyn, and acquaint you with the result at the earliest moment."

On examination before the magistrates the next day, it transpired that Sir Everard Hilton was the complainant in this case, who had deposited this sum of money in the Heddington bank, the proceeds from the sale of a small property lying in a distant part of the country, and which Sir Everard told Mr. Franklyn he should leave in his hands until a favourable opportunity occurred for purchasing a farm, surrounded by his own land, in the immediate vicinity of his residence, Hawkwood. Now Sir Everard, from being defeated in his machinations against Caroline Middleton, and having discovered her attachment to

Herbert Franklyn, called again the second day of the run on the bank, when, unable to obtain his money, he resolved to arrest both father and son on the charge of converting this deposit to their own use.

The prisoners were defended by Chaffman, who cross-examined Sir Everard as to how and when this sum was paid into the Heddington bank; and it was elicited in reply that he called on a certain day, and gave Mr. Herbert Franklyn (his father being absent) a draft on a London banker, drawn by the purchaser of the property he had lately sold, desiring him to send it to London for payment. This Herbert Franklyn freely admitted, and also that he had made use of the money himself without his father's knowledge or consent. Mr. Chaffman contended, therefore, that the son alone was implicated in this transaction, of which the father was both innocent and ignorant; and the magistrates, agreeing in this view of the case, had no alternative, therefore, but to commit the son to take his trial at the ensuing assizes; and as, under the circumstances, friends would not

offer bail to the amount required, Herbert Franklyn was conveyed that same evening to the county jail.

The cause of Messrs. Franklyn's failure arose from their joining in a ship-building company at Liverpool, to which they had been lately advancing large sums of money ; then followed the run upon their bank, by which all their available resources for cash had been exhausted,—and in this dilemma Sir Everard pounced upon them also for his ten thousand pounds. Misfortunes are said never to come singly ; and in a few days after this, the speculative ship-building company failed also from want of funds to carry on their works—Mr. Franklyn having been their chief supporter ; so that nearly the whole of the money he had advanced in this project was irretrievably lost to his creditors.

On hearing the decision of the magistrates, Newman rode directly to Mr. Middleton's, with the hope of first breaking the news of this sad calamity to poor Caroline, whom he found in the greatest distress of mind, from the sudden arrest of her affianced husband. Newman

was endeavouring, from the kindest motives, to make as light as he could of the case, when she impatiently exclaimed—

“Oh, Mr. Newman, pray tell me the worst at once!—I can bear it now, indeed I can, and will submit with resignation to whatever may have happened.”

She was then told that Herbert, to save his father from imprisonment, had taken the whole responsibility of the transaction upon himself.

“This is my firm belief,” continued Newman, “and the opinion of every man in court who knew him; even Chaffman said, ‘It is best as it is,—we could not spare the old man as well as the son.’ You have this great consolation then, dear Miss Caroline, that none think Herbert Franklyn guilty of this offence; and we must all make every exertion to save him from the consequences of his noble sacrifice. Being acquainted with one of the magistrates, I can obtain admittance to see him; and as I know his great anxiety to hear how you have borne this dreadful calamity, I shall call in the morning, when

you are more composed, for any message or letter you may wish to send him."

Mr. and Mrs. Middleton, having given their consent to their daughter's marriage with Herbert, were also in great distress ; but the worthy Vicar, being at heart a true Christian, bore this affliction with pious submission, concealing his own feelings, and endeavouring to give consolation to his wife and daughter.

"I fully appreciate," he said, "my dear Newman, your great kindness in thus interesting yourself in our troubles, and taking the part of the good Samaritan, to bind up our wounds ; but in this world we must expect more sorrow than joy. 'Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil also ?' Trials and troubles are the test by which our faith in God is made manifest,—whether we can kiss the rod by which we are chastened ; and happy, the only happy, they who can say with sincerity, 'Thy will be done.' In this our affliction, it is true the innocent suffer for the guilty, yet we feel acutely the blow which has so suddenly fallen upon us ;—what then must be

the feelings of the guilty? God be thanked, ours are not bitter reflections! and although with Hazael we may exclaim, 'Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?' yet in time of temptation we might also fall away; the warning is ever needed, 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.' "

"Indeed it is, my dear sir," replied Newman; "and in the trust that, as 'the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb,' so poor Caroline may be supported to meet this cutting blast on her young hopes of happiness, with full reliance on God's mercy to clear the innocent, I must now say farewell, having another mission of bad news to Forest Lodge."

One of Newman's peculiarities of character consisted in making himself acquainted with, and apparently taking a deep interest in everybody's concerns; he was a complete Paul Pry, and cared not for trouble or time devoted to this especial purpose, having few resources in himself, and finding time hang rather heavily on hand after the shooting season. During the summer months his chief occupation lay in his flower-garden,

which, abutting on the high road, afforded an opportunity for gossiping with all passers by, in which delightful recreation there was no old woman in the parish had any chance of competition with him. Moreover, he steadily observed the long-exploded maxim of "loving his friends (with a bear's tender hug), and hating his enemies."—*Dislike* was a term foreign to Newman's nature. There was no middle course with him; he hated—bitterly hated any person who had incurred his displeasure, no matter how innocently.

Hugh Fitzwarine had incurred his resentment, because, just before leaving England, he would not make him his confidant, and intrust him with the secret of his journey, which he tried to worm out of him in every possible way; and for this trifling offence he was to be visited with undying animosity. Hugh had presumed to mistrust him—that was enough.—How amiable some men appear, until their true character is revealed. Newman felt rather a pleasure in discovering Mrs. Seaton's loss, as a bar to Hugh's marrying Florence. The secret spring of action also

for his apparent great interest in Caroline, was a *penchant* he had taken for her elder sister, to whom he had been paying (although covertly) assiduous attention for some months ; Mr. and Mrs. Middleton, from his supposed confirmed bachelor habits and age, not entertaining the most remote idea of his ever intending to marry any one, much less their own daughter. But what could Miss Middleton see to admire in Newman ? He was plain in features, more than plain in manners and conversation, and he had the vulgar habit of addressing every lady with *Mum* every five minutes ; but Miss Middleton had been deluded into the belief that he was most amiable in disposition, kind-hearted, generous, candid, honourable, and upright.

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM Mr. Newman's recital of the proceedings which had occurred, and the general impression with regard to the affairs of Mr. Franklyn, Mrs. Seaton anticipated the entire loss of the money she had deposited with him, and she reflected bitterly on her own want of prudence in transferring so large a sum from the funds into a country bank.

"My poor child," she exclaimed to Florence, "what folly I have committed in thus risking all I could give you during my lifetime as a marriage-portion! It has been hitherto a comfort to me to think and dwell with satisfaction on the possession of this sum

of money, as set apart for yourself,—so that you would never become a portionless bride ; —for, even if married to a rich man, it is better a wife should possess some little property of her own, which will prevent the after unpleasant reflection of her being wholly dependent upon her husband.”

“Dearest mamma,” said Florence, interrupting her mother, “do not, pray, make yourself so miserable on account of this money ; it may not all be lost,—and if it should be, you acted with the best intentions, and cannot blame yourself. We have still enough to live comfortably and happily together ; and you know my disinclination to marry yet, if at all. So for my sake do not make yourself so unhappy, for I cannot bear to see you fretting day and night.”

“But, my love, there is a serious loss of income to us, and I fear we must now dispense with some of our little comforts and conveniences.”

“Anything you think necessary to curtail in our expenses, dearest mamma, I will most

willingly comply with—only let me see you cheerful and happy as before.”

“I cannot help feeling it on your account, dear Florence ; for however disinterested men may wish to appear about money in love affairs, it is nevertheless true that few can submit patiently to the jeers of their friends in marrying a girl without a shilling ; and if they do so, the reflection will occur to themselves, that they may have been accepted for their fortune, not for their merits.”

“Well, mamma, as I have no intention to become dependent on anyone but yourself, I shall spare any gentleman the necessity of feeling uncomfortable on my account, until some rich uncle or aunt may leave me a large fortune, and make me independent of a husband.”

“Ah ! my poor child, I feel that will never happen.”

“Stranger things have happened, my dear mother, than this, to many—and why not to me ?”

“Because, my love, you have no rich uncle.”

“Are you quite sure of that ?” asked Flo-

rence. "What has become of my uncle Seaton?"

"That I cannot tell you, my dear, although Mr. Chaffman says that he is married, and has a large family in India."

"Did not Mr. Chaffman deceive you about the bank, mamma?—and may he not deceive you also in this account of my uncle Seaton?"

"Well, my love, I hope in this respect he may be deceived himself,—for I do not believe he would wilfully deceive me, especially in a matter that cannot concern him in any way."

Mr. Chaffman himself overheard this last sentence, as he was just then being ushered into the room, which Florence soon after quitted. The crafty lawyer came with what he called good news for Mrs. Seaton, informing her that the principal creditors had held a meeting, which he had attended for her and himself, and it was there resolved to take out a fiat in bankruptcy against Mr. Franklyn, under which his property would be sold, and he hoped would realize sufficient to pay at

least ten shillings in the pound, if not more.

“ You informed me, Mr. Chaffman, that we should be paid the whole.”

“ Yes, my dear madam, such was my impression then, but certain disclosures have been made since, of which I was not aware.”

“ How soon, then,” inquired Mrs. Seaton, “ may I expect to know for certain what I am really to receive ?”

“ Time, my dear madam, must be allowed for selling to the best advantage, although the property will be immediately advertised. Law proceedings will also cause delay ; but probably in six months the affairs of the bank will be wound up ; it may be a little longer, as in these cases we cannot speak positively to a month or two ; but I shall call, and let you know, from time to time, what progress we are making ;” and thereupon Mr. Chaffman made his bow, and withdrew.

Mrs. Seaton, considering this anything but satisfactory intelligence, resolved at once on retrenchment ; and Donald was desired to try and find a private purchaser, if possible, for

the two ponies and carriage, in preference to selling them publicly.

A few days after, Mrs. Seaton was astonished at the receipt of a letter, bearing the London postmark, which ran thus :—

“MADAM,

“I am instructed to send you fifty pounds every quarter from this date, the first instalment being herein inclosed. Every attempt to discover the name of my employer will be fruitless, whose only request is, that you will not part with your ponies and carriage.

“H. L. L.

“TO MRS. SEATON.”

“How very extraordinary!” exclaimed Mrs. Seaton, handing the letter to Florence; “who can this kind friend be? And the pony-carriage! How could anyone in London hear of our intending to sell that? Oh!—it must be that kindhearted man, Mr. Chaffman; and he has adopted this plan to prevent discovery. But really, Florence, I cannot accept such a

favour at his hands, and shall return him the money the next time he calls."

"I do not think, dear mamma, this is Mr. Chaffinan's doing,—although, after persuading you to place your money in the Heddington Bank, he might feel some compunction in causing you so great a loss, and think himself bound to pay the interest until these affairs are settled. Still, I do not think him so generous, or rather so just, as to do this."

"Then who can it be, my dear? We have no very rich relations and friends that I can think of who would assist us, or who could possibly have known of this loss."

"Indeed, mamma, I cannot tell who this kind friend may be, but I suppose we must comply with the desire of the donor, in not now parting with the pony-carriage."

"Well, my love, for the present we will not do so, until I have seen Mr. Chaffinan."

Florence made no remark at the time, but the thought crossed her mind, that probably Macgregor was the unknown kind friend, from his many acts of benevolence and gene-

rosity in the neighbourhood, which could not be traced to any other hand.

Mr. Chaffman, when calling a few days later, appeared not less astonished than had been Mrs. Seaton, on being told the contents of this mysterious letter, of which he professed to be profoundly ignorant. Still, Mrs. Seaton would insist on his being the kind friend in disguise; and notwithstanding his bland, smirking denial, his manner impressed her yet more with the conviction of his extreme delicacy in not openly avowing himself; but no persuasions could induce him to take the money.

“Indeed, it is not my gift, my dear madam, and therefore impossible for me to take it back. I certainly advise you to apply it as requested, until you can ascertain the name of the donor.”

Now, as Mr. Chaffman drove home, he puzzled his brain in vain to conjecture from whom this donation might proceed.

“Ah,” he thought, “I am checkmated here by some invisible hand; but that good soul gives me credit for the act, and it

will not suit my purpose to dispel her illusion."

Mr. Croly Chaffman was playing a deep game, which few, save a lawyer, could devise—intent on sacrificing his client, and bending her to his will. He represented to those who, he knew, would circulate the report, that Mrs. Seaton had lost the whole of her available funds for her daughter's marriage portion, and that Florence was now without a penny till her mother's death. This news soon spread through the town of Heddington, and was conveyed also to the barracks, with the hope of checking the officers from their visits to Forest Lodge, as Chaffman had now to expect opponents to his scheme, chiefly from that quarter. He had ascertained the fact, known to one only besides himself, that the uncle of Florence Seaton had succeeded to a large property, that he still remained unmarried, and from his dislike to womankind, in all probability never would marry. Mr. Chaffman had also ascertained that the bulk of this property, in the event of her uncle having no children, would descend to Florence ;

more his informant would not say, nor give him the most distant hint as to Mr. Seaton's whereabouts. On this point his agent was inflexible, notwithstanding all Mr. Chaffman's promises of inviolable secrecy, and bribes offered to betray his employer. In short, Mr. Seaton's agent was as sharp as Mr. Croly Chaffman, and not disposed to let his quondam friend into a secret which might occasion himself the loss of his present lucrative situation.

This crafty, plausible lawyer had so thoroughly ingratiated himself into Mrs. Seaton's good opinion, and her confidence in his integrity was so great, that he might nearly have persuaded her that the moon was made of green cheese. Ladies must have their pets of some kind or other, and a pet monkey is mischievous enough, but of all their favourites, a pet solicitor is the worst! How often do we hear them speak of this dangerous animal as the most charming, kind-hearted creature in existence—and so clever! The deception is carried on, until it suits the wolf in sheep's clothing to throw off his dis-

guise, and shew his teeth, then the fair deluded victim exclaims in surprise—"Oh! dear, who would have thought it?" Mrs. Seaton would not listen to anything said in disparagement of her pet, Mr. Croly Chaffman, and Florence, not daring to express her own conviction as to the true friend in need, Mr. Croly Chaffman took the benefit of another's act of generosity.

Captain Mordaunt was not deterred by the rumours of Mrs. Seaton's loss from paying occasional visits to Forest Lodge, although Florence, whom he sometimes found with her mother in the drawing-room, received him with more distant politeness than before, which, in place of lessening, only increased his respect for her, since he clearly now perceived that independent spirit which her recent loss had tended to make more conspicuous. Mr. Chaffman also became a very frequent visitor, and departing from his usual short business-calls, lingered on, apparently enraptured with Florence's music, until nearly the dinner hour, when Mrs. Seaton felt obliged to invite his participation in their evening

meal. On these occasions Mr. Chaffman spoke with apparent acerbity of his laborious profession, to which he said he had been brought up, not from choice, but necessity ; his father insisting he should follow in his footsteps.—“My inclination,” he said one day, addressing Mrs. Seaton, “from boyhood, would have led me to enter the army, a profession much more congenial to my taste and ideas ; but my father would not hear of it ; so now, having to a certain period of my life conformed myself to his wishes, I shall for the remainder of the term consult my own, by giving up the business, and retiring to my country place.”

“It would be almost a pity, Mr. Chaffman,” remarked Mrs. Seaton, “to resign so lucrative a profession, in which you have also so many opportunities of generously assisting your friends and neighbours.”

Chaffman’s practice was never to send in his bill to any neighbour in fair circumstances under four or five years, unless particularly desired ; but, like a fashionable tailor’s in London, who gives long credit, the lawyer’s

bill presented at last a most formidable appearance.

“Very true, my dear madam,” replied Chaffman, in a careless tone, “my profession is exceedingly lucrative and very extensive, too much so for a person of my naturally domestic habits; and having now secured an income far beyond my utmost requirements, I shall retire from public, to enjoy the pleasures of a private country life at Ashton Hall. By the way, my dear madam, you have never done my sister and myself the honour of a visit, to see our country place, which, although not equal to that surrounding Forest Lodge, abounds in beautiful scenery.”

“We are generally considered,” replied Mrs. Seaton, “very bad neighbours, from our stay-at-home propensities; but I should have much pleasure in making Miss Chaffman’s acquaintance.”

Chaffman, secretly delighted at the prospect of introducing his sister to Mrs. Seaton, said Miss Chaffman would do herself the honour of calling upon her the first fine day; and thus, for the present, Mr. Chaffman

having obtained his object, soon after withdrew.

On the third afternoon, Miss Chaffman made her appearance at Forest Lodge, in a handsome carriage drawn by a splendid pair of horses, and being lady-like, with very agreeable manners, Mrs. Seaton was exceedingly pleased with her. Miss Chaffman was by five years her brother's senior, of a tall, commanding figure, with large features, of which the nose was rather too prominent; but for this trifling irregularity in the contour of her face, she would have been considered a very handsome (not pretty) woman.

Unlike her brother, however, who was of a florid complexion, there was a total absence of all colour in her cheeks, and in disposition she was cold and apathetic. Having been well provided for by her father's will, and quite independent of her brother, she nevertheless preferred living with him, by which her own income (save for dresses, &c.) was laid by, to increase her stock in the Funds and Mr. Croly Chaffman's domestic establishment could not have been entrusted to more

careful and able hands than those of his sister ; both, therefore, were equally benefited by this arrangement.

Chaffinan's mother had been a lady of good family, who, when of an age to choose for herself, would persist, in defiance of her parents' grave objections to the match, in marrying the elder Chaffinan, and thereby forfeited her position in society, solicitors of that period not being admissible in the higher circles. Mrs. Chaffinan, like hundreds of other silly girls whose hearts are taken captive by good looks only, bitterly repented in after-life having linked her fate with a man of habits, ideas, and disposition the very reverse of her own, and for whom she had sacrificed almost all her early friends and family connections.

Miss Chaffinan, who had been highly educated, and was, moreover, an exceedingly talented woman, partook largely in the family stock of pride belonging to her mother's family, and, from her independence of manner and fortune, had obtained for herself a good footing in some of the neighbouring families,

with whom her brother also possessed considerable influence. With a determination to raise herself by an advantageous marriage from her brother's sphere, the want of sufficient fortune or sufficient beauty having as yet proved a barrier against her advancement, Miss Chaffman, at the age of forty, still remained a spinster—from choice, not necessity, since she had not been without suitors, who were either too poor, or of too low a grade to suit her ambitious views.

Miss Chaffman, having long wished for an introduction to Mrs. Seaton, went fully prepared with a good stock of ammunition to render her visit as agreeable as possible, which having expended, during half an hour's sitting, with considerable effect, she rose to take leave, stepping into her carriage with the air of a Countess.

"Really, my dear," said Mrs. Seaton, as the carriage drove off, "I had no conception that Miss Chaffman was such a *distingué*-looking person, or possessed such conversational powers; she is very pleasing and lady-like in appearance and manner;" to which

Florence gave only a qualified assent, evidently not so favourably impressed towards their visitor as her mother.

A few days after, Mrs. Seaton returned Miss Chaffman's visit, and was no less pleased with Ashton Hall, which was a fine manorial residence, and furnished in the most luxurious style, with the usual complement of servants belonging to country gentlemen of large fortunes. The gardens and conservatories were kept in first-rate order; and, in addition, there were two large hothouses for grapes and peaches, with an immense kitchen garden, through all of which, and the pleasure-grounds, Mrs. Seaton and Florence were conducted by their obsequious hostess; and it is needless to remark that from that day Mr. Croly Chaffman and his sister rose fifty per cent. at least in Mrs. Seaton's estimation.

On their way home, she could not forbear expatiating on the beauty and *agrémens* of Ashton Hall, and expressing her surprise at Mr. Chaffman not having a wife, instead of a sister, to preside at the head of his fine establishment, which (being taken by Florence

as a hint intended for herself) elicited no observation from her, excepting that she supposed Mr. Chaffman was perfectly satisfied with his sister.

The ice having been now broken, a closer intimacy sprang up rather suddenly between Mrs. Seaton and Miss Chaffman; and her brother also spent rather more time than his neighbours thought connected with business, at Forest Lodge.

CHAPTER IX.

ASHTON HALL lay within five miles of the barracks, and with its cellars of good old wines, presented great attractions to the officers ; and Chaffman was pronounced at mess a “ deuced good sort of fellow,” and not without reason, as some of them dined there once or twice in every week, sometimes oftener. To those who required them, Chaffman was also in the habit of making pecuniary advances, on terms very advantageous to himself.

At these little reunions, after Miss Chaffman had retired from the dinner-table, a general jollification took place — every man drinking according to his fancy ; and on the

last occasion Carleton could not forbear joking Chaffman on his visits to Forest Lodge.

“I say, Croly, my boy, to whose account are all these conferences and consultations to be put down, mother or daughter? By Jove, old fellow, there will be a thundering bill of costs at this rate, and as you say the daughter has not a *son*, and the mother is very indifferently provided with loose cash, I should like to know, uncommonly, how you are to be paid.”

“Oh! in meal or malt (our legal phraseology),” replied Chaffman, laughing, “some time or other.”

“Ah, friend Croly, I see how it is; you have been gammoning us about this girl’s destitute condition, and all that sort of stuff; but the fact is clear enough to me, that there is something behind the scenes, known only to yourself—some wealthy relation, I’ll warrant.”

“Then I suppose you think it incredible that men of our profession should be actuated by any other feeling than the love of money?”

“Love of money comes first, friend Croly,

with most men of your age, if not entirely with those of your class. Soldiers are always falling in love with beauty alone, but lawyers never commit these follies."

"You are quite mistaken, I assure you, Carleton; I, at least, would not marry any girl for money alone."

"But not without it, Croly!" interposed Carleton. "So now it's all safe, Mordaunt," turning to his friend,—“and you know the old vulgar saying, ‘Catch a weasel (which means a lawyer) asleep.’”

Chaffman, feeling chafed by this remark, said, gravely,—

"If any gentleman here thinks to obtain the hand of Miss Seaton with a fortune, he will soon discover his mistake."

"Well, Chaffman," replied Carleton, "this may be very true in one sense, as she appears to be very particular: so let us change the *venue*, and pass the bottle. By-the-by, when are we to have that day's snipe-shooting so long talked of?"

"Any day you like to name, except to-morrow," replied Chaffman

“Then we will name the day after to-morrow ; and I have just the dog for the business—a steady old three-mile-an-hour setter, which will stand a day and a night without breaking his point, and bring his game to hand into the bargain.”

“That sort of animal won’t do for our wild moor-shooting, Carleton ; you shall have a brace of my splendid fast-travelling pointers, over which you will fill your bag before you could get half-a-dozen shots with that old fumbling setter.”

“I’ll bet you five pounds, Chaffman, that if, as you declare, snipes are plentiful, I will kill more with my old fumbler than you, or any man in this room, with your whole kennel of pointers, in one day’s march, from sunrise to sunset.”

“Take him, Chaffman !” cried Willoughby.
“I’ll go halves in the bet, if you like.”

“Well, Carleton, I’ll accept your wager,” answered Chaffman, “and you shall name your own day, as I will mine, after this week.”

“Agreed, friend Croly ! But speaking of

moor-shooting, for which I always prefer setters, I wish—as you can do anything with anybody in these parts—you would get me a couple, or one whelp only, of that Stanmore Abbey breed;—those are the cleverest dogs I have ever yet seen,—and, I am told, as stout as they are handsome—with capital noses.”

“No better than other people’s,” growled Chaffman,—“besides which, I don’t choose to ask favours of the Stanmore Abbey family.”

“Oh, I see, Croly. Don’t quite hit it off with the young Abbot—a peppery youngster, I hear.”

“A conceited, insolent puppy, sir!” retorted Chaffman, “as proud as Lucifer—with nothing to be proud of, except an old Norman name, and as poor as a church mouse.”

“Ah, no pickings there, I see, Croly,—can’t afford to keep an attorney and a hunter too, so prefers the latter. Well, I give him credit for good taste. I would do the same.”

“I declined, sir, to act for Mrs. or Mr. Fitzwarine, from prudential reasons,” replied Chaffman, considerably nettled by Carleton’s remarks.

“ Oh ! no doubt—poor beggars—could not, of course, pay a lawyer’s bill of costs. By-the-by, Croly, don’t you charge our little after-dinner *conversazioni* as conferences and consultations, like one of your craft did to a friend of mine.”

“ How was that done, Carleton ?”

“ Why, this friend, or rather acquaintance of mine, some three years ago, invited his solicitor, who was, or pretended to be, a sportsman, down to his country seat for a week’s partridge-shooting. Well, the fellow came down, helped to fill the bag, although deuced near bagging his client one day, and supplied his friends with game, sending a basket off every second day. He made a precious big hole in the claret and port-wine bins ; and after staying three weeks instead of one (it being the lawyers’ vacation-time in London) with his hospitable client, and having taken every thing offered to him, down to a flitch of bacon, the beggar took his departure. Well, Croly, now will you believe it ?—this rascally attorney—excuse my warmth of expression !—actually sent in a bill of costs to my friend,

only a few months ago, for consultations during the whole time he was staying at his house, and living like a fighting-cock ! Now I call that fellow, Croly, a double-distilled, extra-proof rascal !”

“Rather sharp practice, Carleton, I must admit.”

“Only *rather sharp* do you call it, Croly ? Why, by ‘Mars, Bacchus, and Venus ! were any scamp of an attorney to serve me such a trick as this, I would give him such a *quid pro quo* that he would have cause to remember the name of Carleton to the end of his days !”

“And so would Lieutenant Carleton his bill of costs for damages. But we don’t do things in this way here in the provinces, I assure you, gentlemen,” replied Chaffman.

“Glad to hear it, old fellow ; so now let us adjourn to the drawing-room for a cup of tea, and a little music from Miss Chaffman.”

The next week, Chaffman took his day of snipe-shooting first ; but the weather being stormy, he succeeded in bagging only seven couples ; whereas Carleton, by selecting the

low grounds, on a still, misty morning, killed ten couples before one o'clock, with his steady old setter,—thus winning his bet, with half a day to spare !

It was now the middle of the hunting-season, and Lord ——'s foxhounds, hunted by himself, generally met twice a week, within moderate distances of the barracks. Mor-daunt and Carleton were, however, the only two officers who joined them, the Major being a non-hunting, and Willoughby a ladies' man ; in fact, the time of the latter was fully occupied at Belvidere, notwithstanding the serious remonstrances of his elder and more prudent brother-officers, to which the handsome young cornet paid little attention.

"That Mrs. Bertie," remarked Carleton to him one day, "will lead you into a fearful row, Willoughby, at last ; and how are you to meet heavy damages for crim. con. ?—for to that point matters are verging fast. Your governor won't stand that sort of expense, even if he could afford it."

"I never, of course, expected he would, Carleton ; but as Bertie has been, and is

playing the same game with another woman, of which I can bring forward good proof, by an intercepted letter or two, and witnesses also, he cannot appear in court with clean hands—and therefore damages be hanged ! I'm safe on that score ; and the lady's money, twelve hundred a year, is entirely at her own disposal."

" Still, Willoughby, with your handsome phiz, you may do much better than running away with his little pink-and-white faced doll ! By your own showing you can't marry her if you would ; and an affair of this sort will damage you more than you imagine in after-life."

" Just a feather in my cap with other girls, Carleton ; women prefer young dare-devils of my stamp !"

" Some may, not much better than yourself, Willoughby, but papas and mammas think very differently about these things ; and, besides these considerations, it is not very honourable to run away with the wife of any man, be he Jew, Turk, or Infidel, whose salt you

have eaten, and I'll answer for it drank a pretty many dozen of his wine."

"He has treated her so brutally," replied Willoughby, "that even the servants cry shame upon their own master; and not only so, but as he has virtually renounced her as his wife, she is not in my opinion bound to regard him any longer as her husband; so now, I shall go my way, Carleton, and of course you go yours, and I wish Mordaunt better success in his wooing."

"Over-ripe fruit falls to the ground, and is easily picked up, Willoughby, but that worth possessing takes more time in gathering; so now, good-bye, as I conclude we don't see you at mess to-night."

"Certainly not, Carleton, for I'm sick to death of barrack-fare."

"You may go further, and fare worse, Willoughby,"—with which they parted.

Three months had now elapsed since Hugh Fitzwarine's departure from his native land. Christmas time had arrived, bringing with it the usual festivities, save that over many a previously happy family, among the less

wealthy class, a heavy gloom hung suspended since the failure of the bank, which no effort could dispel, and to whom the other happy faces smiling around them seemed a mockery of their woe. Silent and sad sat Mrs. Fitzwarine by her lonely fireside, the unbidden tear stealing down her care-worn, pallid cheek as she thought of her only child, far, far away, in a distant land, whose cheerful voice and happy smile were wont to gladden her heart and those around her at this festive season of the year. Another occupied the chair he used to sit in, a stranger held the place he was wont to fill, for Ramsey, although attentive and solicitous about her almost as her own son, she felt to be still a stranger; Mrs. Ramsey also, with her gentle, soft, winning smiles, and cheering words of consolation and comfort, failed to rouse her, save for a few fleeting moments, from the deep melancholy by which her mind was oppressed. It was Florence Seaton only whose presence acted like a charm to awaken her from her lethargy—her voice a spell to raise her prostrate spirits, and on pressing her loved and

loving form to her heart, she seemed to embrace again that of her darling child.

During the winter season Mrs. Fitzwarine very seldom left her own room, but Mrs. Ramsey, having become an especial favourite with Mrs. Seaton, often called to take Florence a drive when the weather permitted, during which she generally went round by the Abbey. Florence, though needing comfort herself in her unhappy position, spoke cheerfully of hopeful and happier days, and when alone with Mrs. Fitzwarine, the one subject equally dear and interesting to each formed the theme of their conversation.

Of Hugh's absence they spoke with sorrow and deep regret, of his bright prospects with hope—of his return to his native land with joy mingled with fear.‡

“Oh! may the Almighty guard him from all perils by sea and by land!” Mrs. Fitzwarine would often exclaim, raising her tearful eyes to heaven, “and restore him to me again.”

“Florence,” she said one day, “I fear I have acted very wrongly in allowing him to

incur the risk of this long voyage merely for the sake of greater wealth. We had sufficient—more than sufficient to supply all our wants; and covetousness, we are told, is a great sin. With dread I often think, as a punishment for my avaricious wishes, he may not be permitted to return.”

“Oh! say not so, dearest Mrs. Fitzwarine; for I am the only person deserving blame. For my sake only did dear Hugh wish to become richer; although God knows how reluctantly my consent was given to his wishes; and you know of how little consideration to me is wealth or grandeur. Oh! that we had never met! for all your sorrow has been caused by me; and, should any evil befall him, double misery will be mine. I never could survive his loss!” cried Florence, bursting into tears; “oh! may the Almighty spare us both this bitter sorrow and trial!”

“In his mercy only do I trust, my own dear Florence. So now dry your tears. It is sinful to despair and anticipate evil. Let us cast our care upon Him who careth for us

all, more than we deserve ; but dearly as I love you, my sweet Florence, we must not be too sanguine in our hopes that all difficulties will be removed by my son's prosperous return. Mrs. Seaton may still object to your union, and I cannot encourage you to act contrary to your mother's wishes ; but whatever obstacles may still exist, I shall ever love and regard you as my own daughter, even if married to another."

"That can never be, dearest Mrs. Fitzwarine ; for I know mamma would never exact that from me which would render me wretched for life. And then this strange man, Macgregor, seems to claim a right over me which even my own mother, he says, cannot dispute."

"His acts are very mysterious, dear Florence ; and we must patiently await the development of his plans ; for he has evidently taken a deep interest in yourself and my dear son Hugh."

Thus did these two gentle and affectionate beings endeavour to comfort each other during their separation from him they both loved

with equal tenderness ; for, deep and abiding as is the love of a mother, deeper, if possible, and more enthusiastic is the first love of a young girl, warm-hearted and confiding, for the man of her choice.

CHAPTER X.

THE unexpected arrival of her cousin Sinclair at Forest Lodge, the evening before Christmas day, presented another source of comfort to Florence, notwithstanding his melancholy forebodings that they should never meet again. Through Major Mercer, his friend Colonel Herbert had heard of Florence having rejected Lord Purvis and Sir Everard Hilston, one or two others being added to the list of unsuccessful competitors for her hand, and among these Hugh Fitzwarine, who in consequence was reported to have left home on a long continental tour. This news seemed passing strange to Sinclair; but on further

inquiries, the facts as stated proving correct, he could not resist the flattering hope that Florence might entertain a different feeling towards himself than what he had hitherto believed ; or for whom had she rejected these advantageous offers of marriage ? His friend's letter, upbraiding him with deserting his cousin after obtaining her confidence and love, determined him, therefore, at once to ascertain the true position of affairs at Forest Lodge. Her embarrassment on their meeting gave encouragement to his long-cherished hopes ; and the heightened colour in her face seemed to betray the secret feeling of her heart.

Sinclair's return was hailed with pleasure by Mrs. Seaton, as imparting cheerfulness to their small fire-side party during the long winter evenings. From her Sinclair learnt in due time all particulars, or as many as she deemed it necessary to disclose, respecting Florence's suitors, Fitzwarine alone excepted, of whom no mention was made. She also told him of Captain Mordaunt, still living in hopes of her relenting in his favour, who was

heir to a baronetcy and large landed property, besides being a most agreeable and handsome young man, adding :—" Now you are come, Henry, I hope you will endeavour to persuade Florence to re-consider her too hasty decision as regards Captain Mordaunt ; for you, being a man of the world, must perceive the advantage of such a connection."

Sinclair bit his lip at this cool suggestion, merely saying he would do all in his power to promote his cousin's true happiness, short of advising her to marry any man she really did not love ; and knowing Sinclair's particular ideas on marriage, Mrs. Seaton forbore further remarks on this delicate subject. To Florence herself Sinclair made no allusion touching her reported love affairs, leaving it to her to make any communication she might think proper.

As medical men call to their aid, in their own severe attacks of illness, a brother physician, so Sinclair, distrusting his own judgment, and puzzled how to act in his own case, from the changed aspect of affairs, had been prevailed upon by his friend to ascertain the true state of Florence's feelings towards him-

self; and, as Colonel Herbert persisted in affirming that her affections were really bestowed on him, he had resolved frankly to avow his own attachment, at the same time pointing out his inferiority in a worldly point of view, and not binding her at present by any formal engagement to himself.

After the excitement caused by her cousin's arrival had passed away, Florence relapsed into that thoughtful, melancholy mood to which she had been a prey since Hugh's departure, although concealing her feelings as much as possible from her mother. Sinclair, however, saw at a glance her altered looks and manner; she was no longer the joyous, light-hearted, cheerful girl he had left six months since, in the expanding bloom of youthful beauty; her light, ringing laugh had been exchanged for a cold, subdued smile, which proceeded not from the heart. Sinclair knew she loved by these tokens; but who was the object on whom her young heart's affections had been fixed? This was the point he must, by gentleness and care, endeavour gradually to ascertain, for he soon perceived

a difference even in her conduct towards himself; a varying colour and embarrassment of manner, when they were left alone, for which he was unable to account, except as rather confirmatory of his friend's opinion.

He had now, for the first time, heard with unfeigned regret of Mrs. Seaton's loss of money through the failure of the bank, and with no less surprise of the unknown friend by whose intervention her income had not as yet been diminished. Sinclair, however, could not, and would not believe this act of generosity proceeded from Chaffman; "although, in my opinion," he added, when speaking on the subject to Mrs. Seaton, "a solicitor ought by law to be held responsible for any loss or risk his client might incur by following his suggestions, in investing money."

On hearing of Sinclair's arrival, Major Mercer called, and having invited him to dine at their mess, Sinclair, in return, was desired by Mrs. Seaton to ask the Major and the other officers to a small party at Forest Lodge on Twelfth Night, when Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey and a few other friends were expected. On

this occasion Sinclair narrowly observed the behaviour of Mordaunt, whose extreme deference to Florence, and her indifference to him, admitted of one interpretation only.

As birds of a feather flock together, so, from this night, Ramsey, by the expression of sentiments so congenial to his own, became soon on more intimate terms with Major Sinclair; but on the subject of Hugh Fitzwarine's departure from the Abbey, and the cause of his absence, he was not disposed to be very communicative. On one point Sinclair was doubtful, from Mrs. Fitzwarine's affectionate manner towards Florence, that she could scarcely have rejected her son; and when his name was mentioned, the same flush he had observed months before would still rise to his cousin's cheek. By forbearing, however, to make any allusions to the past, or inquisitive enquiries on this subject, to which Florence seemed so averse, her former confidential manner towards him began to return, and her spirits to revive.

In addition to her fondness for her cousin, he was now entitled to her gratitude also, for

espousing her cause against mercenary marriages ; so that she was spared by her mother any further importunities about Captain Mordaunt, who had apparently resigned his suit in hopeless despair soon after the Major's return.

At the end of a month Sinclair spoke of leaving Forest Lodge.

"Do not go—pray do not leave us again so soon," Florence exclaimed, with an imploring look, of the sincerity of which her earnestness of words and manner sent conviction to his heart.

"Would you keep me ever with you then, dear Florence?" he asked, in a gentle, enquiring tone, which sent the blood rushing through her cheeks.

"Oh ! go not yet, at least," she quickly replied ; "mamma's spirits are so much better since your return, and I feel so much more happy. Pray do not leave us now again so abruptly."

"Well, dear girl, it shall be as you desire, for you know how happy I am always in your dearly-loved society ; but I feared your

mother might think my stay here already too long."

"Oh! no, indeed, Henry,—mamma said only last night she felt so much more independent and secure whilst you were with us; for in this lonely place, during the long winter nights, she is dreadfully nervous sometimes about house-breakers."

"So that is the reason, Miss Florence, you wish me to remain, is it? merely as a protection from robbers—a pretty confession, indeed, after my giving you credit for different feelings."

"Well, Henry," she said, playfully, "if you think *me* actuated by any such motives as these, I will not ask you to remain another day."

"Then, of course, dear Florence, I must prolong my visit,—how much longer will depend chiefly on yourself."

"Will you promise me it shall, Henry?" she asked, quite cheerfully.

"Yes, indeed, dear Florence, it shall."

At this assurance her features recovered their usual beaming expression of happiness,

and mutual confidence was once more established between the cousins.

The aphorism that "absence is a cure for love" proved not so with Florence Seaton, although the poignancy of her grief on first parting with Hugh Fitzwarine had now been considerably assuaged ; to her also was wanting the oil which in so many cases tends to feed the flame of love, written communication between the lovers ; for, next to the actual presence of a beloved object, is his or her handwriting. This pleasure was denied to Florence ; she did not expect to hear again from Hugh until his arrival at Calcutta, and her cousin's presence prevented her indulging in unavailing sorrow for his absence.

There were times when she longed to make him the confidant of her attachment, but his former harsh opinion of Hugh sealed her lips on this subject ; and from his so seldom making mention of his name, she feared his prejudices had not been removed ; but of her engagement to him she dare not speak, from the dread of incurring Macgregor's anger.

Of this strange being Florence had not

heard anything since her lover's departure ; but his hand had been felt, if not seen, by others ; by him the poor were never forgotten. Mr. Middleton had received, as previously, the week before Christmas, a letter, containing fifty pounds, with this laconic direction, " For the poor of your Parish !"

Near Macgregor's bungalow, on the moor, lived a hard-working, industrious farmer, named Elliott, by birth a Scotchman, with a large family, who rented under Mr. Croly Chaffman. By frugality this man had saved five hundred pounds, which, having unfortunately deposited in the Heddington Bank, he now considered as entirely gone. Poor Elliott had calculated on part of this *nest-egg* (as he called his savings) to meet his half-year's rent, now over-due, but, according to the custom of that neighbourhood, payable the week before Christmas—the price of oats—his chief corn crop—being so low just then, and harvested so badly, that every stack in his yard would have been unequal to make up the sum required ; and Chaffman, although knowing his loss, insisted on his rent

being paid as usual. In vain Elliott begged for a little more time from his hard-hearted landlord; a distress warrant was put on his goods and chattels, and irretrievable ruin stared him in the face. Under such circumstances, the attempt to borrow of his neighbours was, of course, fruitless. On the night previous to the sale, as he sat before the peat fire, with his hands covering his face, as if not daring to look on his wife and children mourning and bewailing around him, the door of the kitchen in which they were sitting was opened, unperceived by any, and a heavy hand laid on Elliott's shoulder, which caused him to spring to his feet and confront the intruder, in whom, by the flickering light of the decaying embers in the grate, he recognized the dark features and powerful frame of the gipsy.

"Hoot, man!" cried Elliott, "could ye na leave us alone the last night we have to spend together in our hame—the gude wife, and my puir bairns? What would ye have at this time o' night?"

"Nothing that you can give me, neighbour

Elliott," replied the gipsy, "except a lighted candle on that table."

This being placed accordingly, the gipsy, from an old leather case, produced a roll of bank-notes and gold, and placing them on the table, said, gravely—

"Count that money, Farmer Elliott, and tell me the amount."

Poor Elliott, with trembling hands, turned note over note, until, with the gold, they represented one hundred and thirty-six pounds.

"That is right, neighbour," added the gipsy in answer to his inquiry; "that will pay your rent to-morrow, and that villanous lawyer's charges;" and before Elliott could recover from his amazement, the gipsy had disappeared.

"The gude Lord be praised," said his wife, falling on her knees before the table (on which the money still lay untouched), "for his mercies to us this night! What ails ye, husband, that ye dinna take it up?"

"Is it fairly come by, from such hands as his?" asked Elliott, with a scared look; "it may bring down a curse on us, instead o' a blessing."

“Hoot, mon, with sick fashions ! I ken whar the money come fra’. The gipsy’s only done his master’s bidding. This is in return for the eggs and chicken I hae sometimes left at the Macgregor’s door ; tak it, and be thankful for the loan.”

By acts such as these the name of Macgregor spread far and wide among the humble classes ; and in return for his beneficence, small presents were left by stealth at his door, of fruit, vegetables, and poultry, by the grateful recipients of his bounty ; for the gipsy was recognized as his agent in all these transactions, although the name of his employer never escaped his lips.

CHAPTER XI.

DURING the events of the last two months, the tongue of Miss Pringle had found constant employment in discussing the losses and misfortunes of her neighbours by the bank's failure, the grand doings at the Castle, and the scandalous doings at Belvidere; and having twice failed in marrying Florence Seaton, she now communicated to Mrs. Middleton, as a certain fact, that Miss Seaton had long been engaged to her cousin, Major Sinclair, and that the marriage was to take place in the March following.

There was one subject, however, on which Miss Pringle was exceedingly touchy—the

entire ignorance of anything respecting the recluse's family or connections with which her friends and neighbours were continually reproaching her. The question was continually put, "Well, Miss Pringle, who is Macgregor?"

She could not tell, notwithstanding her unceasing efforts to ascertain this fact. She knew no more than others, that he was a strange and rich man, but nothing beyond. She had tried to bribe men, women, and children to lie in ambush under the windows of his bungalow, in vain. Some from fear, others from respect to the recluse, declined this hazardous task. She resolved, therefore, in despair, to undertake it herself; and, in company with the baker's boy, a stout lad of sixteen, she set out one fine afternoon on this hopeful exploit, which her companion by no means fancying, he stipulated to remain behind a high bank, more than three hundred yards from the bungalow, and there await her return.

Miss Pringle did not half like this arrangement; but the boy would not go a step further.

“Oh! come, Charley, a little nearer,” she pleaded. “I’ll give half-a-crown instead of the shilling.”

“I shan’t go no nearer, Mum,” replied the boy.

“Five shillings, then, Charley. I can’t afford more.”

“I wouldn’t do it for a guinea, Miss, at this time o’ day.”

It was beginning to get rather dusky; and the loud croaking of a raven, as he winged his heavy flight just over their heads, seemed to forewarn them both of danger.

“I don’t like this job anyways, Miss,” continued the boy, “so here’s your shilling.”

“Oh! Charley, you won’t be such a coward as to leave me here alone, will you?”

“Then you must make haste, Miss,” replied the boy in a sulky tone.

Miss Pringle’s heart (although a stout one for her little body) was beginning to go pit-a-pat, when the thought of being ridiculed for her timidity urged her to proceed; and cautioning the boy to run to her assistance, if wanted, which, by the way, was perfectly un-

necessary, she quickened her pace in desperation, lest by delay her courage might evaporate, and was soon creeping stealthily round the back premises, and reached safely a laurel bush close to the window of Macgregor's sitting-room, beneath which she crouched, trembling like an aspen-leaf. The blinds were down, and the voice of Macgregor heard talking to some other person. Curiosity predominated over every other feeling. She placed her ear close to a pane of glass.

"Why, Tom, my old friend, what do you hear or see?" she heard him ask, to which there was no response. The question was repeated by Macgregor—still no reply followed. The window-frame was then gently raised; and as Miss Pringle drew back, to conceal herself from view, a huge black cat flew suddenly on her shoulders, burying his talons in her neck. Screaming with horror and pain, she fled rather than ran from the spot, with the cat still clinging to her back, crying loudly to Charley for succour, when the report of a pistol gave increased speed to her flight.

Mistaking the track-way, she fell headlong

into a peat-hole, half full of bog-water. Fortunately it was neither deep nor wide, so that she soon scrambled out again; but, oh! what a figure emerged the smart little Miss Pringle! No matter!—on she sped, regardless of bonnet or shawl, now freed from the cat, which left her in the water. Charley's place of ambush was quickly reached, but there was no Charley; for that individual, on hearing Miss Pringle's piercing shriek when assailed by the cat, immediately cut and ran, without hesitation, never looking behind him, or slackening his pace, until he reached the baker's shop, when he told his master of their adventures, and Miss Pringle being seized by a bogle on the moor, near Macgregor's house.

Miss Pringle being a favourite with the baker, he saddled his horse immediately, and getting a neighbour also to aid and assist, they rode away for the moor. When about half way on their road, they met Miss Pringle returning in woful plight, and ready to faint from such unusual exertions, having in her flight dropped her shawl and also a shoe.

“Ods bobs, ma'am,” said the baker,

“where ha’e ye been to, and what’s the matter? Ye look scared like and dripping wet, wi’ yer clothes torn off yer back;” and as he saw her bleeding neck, “Ye are scratched all over, as if ye had been draggit through a whin brae.”

“Oh! Mr. James,” cried Miss Pringle, “that horrid cat has nearly killed me!”

“The deil a cat would have served you like this, my poor, wee body,” examining carefully her neck and shoulder.

“It was only Mr. Macgregor’s cat, I tell you, James, which, as I passed his house, flew out upon me like a tiger.”

“Aweel, Miss, dinna fash yoursel’ ony mair aboot it—cat or bogle—but get up on Missus’s pillion, behind old Robin. Ye canna trudge it afoot, with ane shoe only;” and thus (lectured by the baker, as they rode along, for venturing out on the moor so late in the evening) returned the crest-fallen, discomfited little gossip to her quarters in the village.

On reaching the baker’s shop, out rushed the stout baker’s wife, who, seeing her lodger’s

forlorn condition and her dripping garments, seized her in her powerful arms, and carried her up to her sleeping apartment, where, without ceremony, she immediately placed her in bed, and a warm cordial administered, in the shape of a pretty stiff glass of gin and water, which Mrs. James insisted on her swallowing off-hand, to prevent her, as she said, catching her death of cold; Martha, the maid-of-all-work, making sad lamentations the while about the new-year's bonnet, entirely ruined by the peat water.

For nearly a week the gossip was missed from her usual haunts in the village. People wondered what had become of her; and by many her absence was really deplored, to whom she stood in the place of a newspaper. The earliest intelligence of all the births, marriages, and deaths in the neighbourhood always reached Miss Pringle—how, no one knew; but some might have guessed, by means of the baker's cart, which traversed the country round with bread, rolls, muffins, and biscuits, picking up news as well as pence.

Mrs. James was famed for her rolls and

biscuits of various kinds. She was even patronized by the great lady at the Castle, whose housekeeper could not produce such biscuits as Mrs. James; and thus she had the *entrée* of every house in the neighbourhood.

There is a trite old saying, "that the dog that will fetch will carry;" and the baker's boy was not slow to acquaint his master's customers with Miss Pringle's adventures on the moor, so that, when her scratches were healed, that she could again make her appearance in public, the tables were turned upon herself with jocose remarks on her fight with the bogle. This putting the little body on her mettle, she resolved on a second excursion, by daylight this time, to get speech of the recluse himself; but dreading a second onslaught from black Tom, she took with her the baker's rough terrier, Viper, who often followed her in her rambles, and old Betty, the village tramp (in place of Charley), as companion, who was to remain within hail, but out of sight, in case of accidents. Confident in Viper's well-tried prowess against rats and vermin, Miss Pringle advanced this time

boldly to the front door of the bungalow, where to her horror stood black Tom, with bristles erect, and glaring eyeballs, swearing like a trooper. Miss Pringle stepped back in amazement—she had never beheld such a cat before. He was of huge proportions; and, as he lashed his long, bushy tail, ready for a spring at the dog, even Viper shrank back in dismay from his infuriated foe.

Miss Pringle, fearing a serious fight, endeavoured to pacify the cat by calling “Pussy—poor Pussy!” but the sound of her voice roused black Tom to fury; and with a sudden bound he sprang on the dog, fixing his claws firmly in his rough hair and skin, and with his teeth holding him by one ear. Viper yelled, and tried to dislodge his savage enemy from his back, but in vain. He held on with fearful tenacity, growling and biting with the greatest ferocity, until the dog, turning tail, fled across the moor.

Taking advantage of her enemy’s engagement with Viper, Miss Pringle reached the door—bell or knocker there was none—when, applying the point of her umbrella, a voice,

from whence proceeding she knew not, said, in a loud, angry tone—

“Go home to your friends in Leeds, Polly Popkins, and never dare venture here again!”

At this saying she fled, more terror-stricken than when pursued by black Tom. Her early history and family name were clearly known, from these words, to the recluse. It was more than sufficient; the name of Macgregor never again passed her lips,—and from that day Miss Pringle became less inquisitive into her neighbour's affairs, and more charitable towards the feelings of others.

Major Sinclair and Mr. Ramsey had by this time become on intimate terms, and the latter having been accustomed in early life to field-sports, occasionally joined the Major with dog and gun, in the Forest Lodge woods, where woodcocks at that season of the year abounded, so that from seven to ten couples might be bagged by a good shot in one day, during frosty weather, when these birds were driven from the higher grounds and plantations to the springs and rivulets running through this sheltered glen.

Ramsey, from his profession, disliked now to be considered a sportsman, or to kill game for amusement; but, relishing woodcocks above all game, and time hanging sometimes heavy on hand, he saw no impropriety in taking an occasional stroll with Hugh's setters and Macpherson, to supply Mrs. Fitzwarine's table with a second course.

He had been shooting with Sinclair one day when he was to dine at Forest Lodge, and as they were returning home, a wounded woodcock rose from the outside ditch (but so close to them that neither could fire), and was marked down again by the keeper in the high coppice about a hundred yards below.

"Of course we must have that bird," remarked Sinclair, "which will make up our eight couple,—four for you, and four for me."

"I am quite satisfied to let well alone, Sinclair; but as the bird is evidently wounded, it would be an act of mercy to put him out of suffering."

"Then if you'll follow me, sir," said Macpherson, "I know a narrow track which will lead us to the spot."

They were following each other in single file, Ramsey being behind Sinclair some twenty yards, when the keeper, hearing the bird rise, cried out,

“Mark cock !”

Ramsey hastily raised his gun on full-cock, but ere it reached his shoulder, the trigger was caught by one of the boughs surrounding him, and the greater part of the shot lodged in Sinclair’s right arm, above the elbow, the simple exclamation only escaping him,—

“Oh, Ramsey, you have broken my arm !”

Ramsey’s horror may be imagined, when, rushing to his friend’s assistance, he saw the blood escaping in a stream down Sinclair’s coat-sleeve, and his arm hanging helpless by his side. Fortunately, there were two beaters with them, one of whom was sent off on the shooting-pony for the village surgeon, while Sinclair, his arm being bound up with pocket-handkerchiefs, was supported to Forest Lodge, poor Ramsey, from his excessive grief, being almost as much to be pitied as his friend.

By his particular desire to avoid giving

alarm to Mrs. Seaton or Florence, Sinclair was led into a small back room, and there laid on a sofa, being nearly exhausted from loss of blood; and whilst attended by Donald and Macpherson, Ramsey was commissioned to break the intelligence of this sad accident to the ladies, and, by Sinclair's wish, to make as light of it as possible. A more unfit agent could not have been employed in this mission; for by his pale looks and self-reproaches, Ramsey magnified, in place of modifying, Sinclair's injuries.

Florence, terrified at his recital of the accident, and believing her cousin mortally wounded, rushed into the room where he lay, and beholding his death-like looks, she threw herself on her knees by his side, and burst into tears.

"Florence, dear Florence!" he exclaimed, "do not thus distress yourself—I am not dangerously hurt, and my arm being once set by the surgeon, I shall soon be well."

"Is that true, Henry, on your honour?" she asked; "do not deceive me."

"Indeed I believe it is, dear girl; but you

can ask Donald, who has been accustomed to see wounds of every description."

Donald making light of it also, Florence was persuaded by her mother to leave the room, as the surgeon had just arrived.

CHAPTER XII.

THE scene between Miss Seaton and her cousin made a strong impression on the mind of Ramsey, who remained that night at Forest Lodge, and the deep feeling she showed for him, expressed more by looks than words, impressed him with the belief that she had transferred her love from Hugh Fitzwarine to Major Sinclair; and, truth to speak, he could not greatly wonder if she had, since, on nearer acquaintance, the Major became daily more estimable in his sight; in fact, Ramsey, when talking over this matter with his wife, some few days after the accident, observed, that Sinclair was the man of all others to engage the

affections of a young, sensible girl like Florence Seaton.

“Girls, you know, my love, generally show a preference for men older than themselves, considering youths of their own age as mere boys—and therefore, I conclude, too volatile to be trusted as husbands. Is it not so, my wee wife?”

“Most probably, my sage husband,” replied Mrs. Ramsey; “nevertheless, I believe Florence to be firmly and very deeply attached to Mr. Fitzwarine.”

“And I hope so, too, my love, for poor Hugh’s sake, although I must confess that the Major is superior in many respects to my younger friend. That, of course, is only between ourselves.”

“In what, then, is Major Sinclair his superior?” asked Mrs. Ramsey.

“In age, certainly, Fanny; that is one point gained on my side.”

“Of little consequence, Robert, in my opinion, unless men with increasing years become more virtuous.”

“In worldly knowledge, Fanny.”

“An advantage in a worldly point of view only, being a doubtful recommendation in other respects.”

“In literary acquirements, and conversational powers.”

“There, Robert, I must yield to you. Major Sinclair is clever, well-informed, and has travelled much, so that he is a most entertaining and instructive companion.”

“What shall we say of person and manners, Fanny?” asked her husband, archly, “of which ladies are the best judges.”

“In one of these Mr. Fitzwarine is decidedly superior, in the other equal, when he likes, to Major Sinclair.”

“For temper, disposition, and kindness of heart, the Major is most conspicuous, Fanny, and I believe, in all these, superior to your favourite.”

“Hugh is quick and hasty sometimes, but oh! Robert, can there exist a more loving and devoted son? And for kind, considerate feelings, does not every servant and labourer about the place almost adore their young master?”

“ Yes, Fanny, indeed they do. Hugh is a noble, generous lad, and I must admit you have fought his battle fairly and well. Sinclair, however, is a dangerous rival, and should Hugh’s stay be prolonged in India, I dread the consequences. This accident also, caused by my unlucky hand, has excited deep compassion, if not a stronger feeling in Florence towards her cousin ; and pity, with women, verges closely on love.”

“ Yet, pity for another’s sufferings, although that other may be dear, is nothing in comparison with a girl’s first love—that is devotion, almost amounting to idolatry, which neither time nor circumstances can change.”

“ Ay, ay, Fanny, a very pretty, glowing picture of your own sex, my love, in their youthful innocence ; but these enthusiastic ideas are seldom found to last beyond their teens—like very warm weather in June, three hot days and a thunder storm—excessive heat of attachment for a while, and then a flood of tears clears the atmosphere. Florence was, doubtless, very much in love with Hugh ; she was bound to be after his rescuing her from

a watery grave ; you would not suppose her so unwomanlike as not to fall in love with him ; it would have been a reflection on any girl to have acted otherwise, my dear Fanny. You would have done the same at her age, your affections not being previously engaged."

" You are now joking, Robert, for girls are not such simpletons as you represent them, and I will not hear any more such unjust reflections on Florence Seaton."

The injury to Sinclair's arm was likely to be attended with more serious consequences than at first expected, the surgeon fearing at first amputation would be necessary ; but by great care and perfect quietude, the inflammatory symptoms subsided, and after the sixth day, no further danger was apprehended. The anxious solicitude of Florence during this period of uncertainty was apparent to every one of the household, each drawing his own conclusions, which tended to one point ; but Mrs. Seaton thought there was nothing extraordinary in it, from Florence's affection for her cousin since her childhood. Sinclair, however, now felt assured that she regarded

him with a far deeper interest than he had hitherto permitted himself to believe, and on his return to the drawing-room, all those little attentions peculiar to women fully confirmed him in this belief. For hours she sat at the piano singing and playing to beguile the time, and, until able again to use his hand, her ready assistance was never wanting where she could be of use.

Sinclair dwelt on these things more, perhaps, than he would otherwise have done if he had had sisters, who are accustomed to minister to their brothers' wants ; and he often expressed, by sparkling eye and tender words, the grateful feelings of his heart for all her kind consideration. Time to him had passed rapidly and delightfully away, notwithstanding his occasionally suffering pain, and he had now the free use of his arm.

One morning, as Florence was sitting near him, painting a group of flowers, one of which she had just presented to him, he said—

“ Dear Florence, how can I ever make you amends for your loving kindness to me, shown in so many ways during my long illness ? ”

“Oh! Henry, that is only some trifling return for your many kind acts and gifts to me ever since a child; I feel I am your debtor still.”

“No, my dear Florence, that I cannot admit. I am indebted to you for the happiest days I have ever spent, never to be forgotten, perhaps never to return.”

“And why not to return, dear Henry? We may, I trust, spend many happy days together yet.”

“Could you consent to pass all your days with me, dearest Florence?” he asked, in a trembling voice.

Florence raised her eyes to his face with an inquiring glance; she could scarcely be mistaken in that look. She neither spoke nor moved—scarcely breathed; but a deathlike pallor overspread her features, and her eyes rested on the flowers before her.

“Florence!” exclaimed Sinclair, “in mercy speak; say you do not despise my love. Do not hate me for this confession. I read in those pale cheeks and averted eye how fallen I am in your opinion.”

“ Oh, Henry !” she cried, with sudden energy, “ what could lower you in my opinion ? It is *I* who feel fallen in my own, because I cannot love you as you deserve.”

“ And why not, dear Florence,” asked Sinclair, taking her cold, trembling hand in his ; “ why cannot you love me ?”

Again her eyes sought the flowers, but no response escaped her.

“ Ah, Florence,” he exclaimed, his suspicions now roused by her silence, “ is it because you love another with a deeper feeling than myself ?”

Her struggling emotion and varying colour betrayed the secret which her lips refused to confess ; and with a deep-drawn sigh, which seemed to rend his breast, and releasing the hand of Florence, Sinclair fell back on the sofa, covering his face with his hands.

At that moment every other feeling gave place to her long-cherished, deeply-seated affection for that dear cousin she had so loved from childhood, and who now lay prostrate by her own hand. Her agony on beholding his agitation was, if possible, greater than his

own, when, almost unconscious of what she was doing, she sprung to his side, and seizing his hand, cried, frantically—

“Oh, Henry, my own dear cousin! spare me your reproaches. I will be yours,—anything you desire!”

“My dear, true-hearted girl,” replied Sinclair, mournfully, pressing her hand to his lips, “I will not accept such a sacrifice at your hands, dearly, fondly as I love you above all the world. No, dear Florence, it must not be, if your heart is already given to another; still, love me as your own dear cousin,—I will be content.”

“No, Henry,” she said, “that is not enough—you must be happy also, for your happiness I value far above my own; let me see you cheerful as before this hour, unless you would make me miserable also.”

“My own precious girl, I will endeavour to be so, but must not harass you more on this subject now, which needs deep reflection; we have both, I fear, been too hasty.”

This suggestion of Sinclair’s was fortunate, as it enabled them both to recover a degree

of composure before Mrs. Seaton entered the room, saying,—

“ My dear Florence, as the day is so fine, I wish you to do a little shopping for me at Heddington ; Henry will, I dare say, drive you there, for my cold is still too heavy for me to leave the house.”

The Major having expressed his delight in being of any service, the carriage was ordered after luncheon, and Florence, glad to escape, sought her room, to prepare for her drive.

What her thoughts were there, when alone, it would be nearly impossible to express. If almost distracted at sight of her cousin's distress of mind, she felt bewildered now, when trying to recollect exactly what had passed between them at that agitating interview. One fact, however, she remembered too well,—placing her hand in his, and offering to become his wife, when her heart belonged, and her hand had been pledged to another ! She was horrified at this act ; but, after a little reflection, resolved to lay all before her cousin, in whose generosity she could implicitly confide. Sinclair, guessing what had been pass-

ing in her mind, from her serious looks when returning to the drawing-room, said, in a cheerful, gay tone :—

“ Florence ! I fear we have both been very silly this morning ; but don’t for a moment distress yourself at anything you have said or done under the impulse of the moment. We will talk rationally and soberly on this matter to-morrow, as two steady persons of our respectable age and characters ought to do ; so now, dear girl, cheer up, and think no more about it.”

She was going to reply, when Sinclair interposing, said—

“ Not another word, dear Florence, until this time to-morrow, when you may tell me anything you like.”

During their drive to and from Heddington, Sinclair appeared in his usual good spirits, conversing cheerfully with Florence on various subjects, as if nothing serious had passed between them ; and on that same evening he exacted from her his usual favourite songs, and in his usual kind manner wished her

good-night. Florence felt she had nothing to apprehend.

Sinclair lay thoughtful on his bed, pondering over his cousin's deep and strong attachment, which would induce her to sacrifice every other feeling for him ; it was far beyond his most sanguine expectation, for it was evident from her hesitation that she loved another, and yet that other she would resign for him. He felt proud of such love—such devotion to himself, and even compassion towards his unknown rival, whom she would discard for his sake. What could he desire more ? Her hand in marriage ?—would that increase her love, her happiness, or his own ?

The next morning, at breakfast, Sinclair met her with increased warmth, which caused her embarrassment in look and manner ; and as Mrs. Seaton was not well enough to appear that morning at the table, poor Florence, standing in dread of some further remarks from her cousin, felt ill at ease.

“ Why, my dear Florence ! ” he exclaimed, with a laugh, “ you are putting the sugar in the cream-ewer instead of my cup ! ”

"How stupid I am," she replied, with a forced smile.

"No, my dear girl, you are fearful of another scene with me,—but that, I promise you, shall not occur; so make a good breakfast, after which we will take a stroll together in the glen, for after considering, the *pros* and *cons* last night, I fear, Florence, second thoughts are best, and I must ask you to let me unsay my say of yesterday."

"As you please, Henry," she replied, blushing deeply, but in a more cheerful tone, although still feeling nervous, lest her cousin might ask questions which she could not answer about Hugh Fitzwarine.

Florence, equipped for a walk, soon made her appearance after breakfast; for an unpleasant revelation, like a distasteful draught, is better taken at once. So thought both Florence and Sinclair; and the latter had no sooner reached the pleasure-ground, than, hurrying directly *in medias res*, he said, abruptly,—

"Florence, deeply, gratefully as I feel your love towards me, I must release you at once

from your generous offer to become my wife, for, on due reflection, I am better as I am ; in short, I am a confirmed bachelor already in habits and ideas. Moreover, my age is nearly double yours,—so that when you would be in your woman's prime of life, I should be, if permitted to live so long, a grey-headed, decrepit old man. No, my dear girl, it must not be ; and subject, as you know I am, to rheumatic attacks, a nurse would be more suitable for me than a wife. 'This confession is very humiliating for a Major of Dragoons,' he said, laughing ; "so, all things considered, I now throw myself on your clemency, to forgive my foolish *escapade* of yesterday. For your generous offer of sacrificing your youth and beauty to an elderly man like myself, I do, and ever shall, feel most grateful, and, if possible, must love you more than before. So now, my beloved Florence, treat me as heretofore, with your accustomed confidence. This subject shall never be renewed by me."

"I fully understand and appreciate your generous motives, dear Henry, in thus speaking, and believe me, it would be impossible

for me to love you more, even were a nearer tie to exist between us, than I do at this moment."

Assuring her of his entire belief in her words, Sinclair reverted to other subjects, generously forbearing during their walk to make any allusion to her almost admitted attachment for another.

What now, it may be asked, should prevent Sinclair leaving Forest Lodge? His first impulse, the evening of his proposal, was to leave that place without delay, for he saw at once that the heart of Florence had been given to another, although her hand had been offered to him. One strong motive restrained him, the dread of inflicting greater pain on that dear, unselfish girl, who had preferred his happiness to her own. She had seen his anguish, and he well knew from her depth of feeling for him, until now never truly fathomed, that his leaving her at such a moment would occasion her the most poignant grief. He had not been subjected to the mortification of a refusal, so humiliating to a man of high spirit, and although disappointed, and deeply

so, on discovering her heart was not wholly his, yet, by reflecting on their ties of consanguinity, and the light in which she had so long regarded him, he had no just cause to be dissatisfied with his position, or reproach her for allowing her young, girlish affections to be gained by another, in the ignorance of his real feelings towards herself.

“No,” murmured Sinclair, “it is I see now my own fault; six months ago her hand and heart might cheerfully have been given to me—then, knowing no other love—but even then I would not have exacted such a sacrifice, much less would I accept it now.”

More genuine and lasting pleasure is derived from self-denial than from selfish gratification. The mastery of mind over matter is a conquest of which we may justly feel proud. From that day the *mens conscia recti* imparted cheerfulness to Sinclair’s manner, and Florence now, on discovering his true generosity of heart, thought sometimes she could sacrifice even Hugh Fitzwarine for his sake.

After remaining a week longer at Forest Lodge, during which the usual cordiality had

been renewed between the cousins, Sinclair bade Mrs. Seaton and Florence farewell, having exacted a promise from the latter to write to him every week at Canterbury, adding, gaily—

“I do not wish you to forget me, my dearest girl, and if, disappointed in your present hopes, you should feel disposed, some time hence, to become an old man’s *nurse*, instead of a young man’s slave, I give you leave to fall back upon your cousin Henry.”

“You would not accept me then, perhaps,” she replied.

“Yes, dear girl, most thankfully at any time—and now, God bless you—good-bye,” and straining her to his heart, he sprung into the carriage, and was gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

FLORENCE sought her room, and there gave way to a burst of tears, which she had struggled to suppress on parting with her cousin. His manliness of character, and delicacy of feeling towards herself, in suppressing every allusion to his own disappointment, or her affection for another, caused her to dwell more upon his many excellent qualities, and she felt regret at that moment that she could not repay his deep attachment with a love as unselfish as his own.

These reflections had scarcely passed through her mind, when, on hearing carriage wheels approaching the house, she saw Mr. and Mrs.

Ramsey driving up to the Hall door. On beholding them, her thoughts were quickly diverted into another channel. They might bring intelligence of Fitzwarine, and by a hasty ablution having washed the traces of tears from her eyes, she descended to the drawing-room, where she found her friends alone, her mother not having yet joined them.

Mrs. Ramsey's first exclamation on seeing her enter instantly confirmed this impression, who, on taking her hand, said—

“We have had delightful news this morning, dear Florence; and here is something to cheer your heart also,” delivering a letter, which Florence deposited in her pocket. “He has reached Calcutta in safety and good health,” added Mrs. Ramsey, “which is all I need say at present.”

“Is Sinclair gone already?” asked her husband. “I had hoped to shake him once more by the hand.”

“He has left us about an hour,” replied Florence, “to join his regiment at Canter-

bury, which he thinks will soon be ordered to India."

"Strange," murmured Ramsey, aside, "should they meet."

"You have heard, of course," remarked Mrs. Ramsey, "of our village gossip, Miss Pringle?"

"Yes," replied Florence, "I hear she is a most mischief-making person."

"But you do not know, I dare say, that she takes an especial interest in Miss Florence Seaton, or that she has already given you away in marriage to at least half-a-dozen gentlemen;—first to Sir Everard Hilston, from whom, my dear, you have had a most fortunate escape, for he is a horrid, unforgiving character, judging from his unrelenting persecution of that unfortunate young man, Herbert Franklyn, out of revenge, it is said, for Caroline Middleton preferring the young banker to the rather old Baronet. Then, my dear, you were certain to become Lady Purvis; next, Mrs. Major Mercer—another most fortunate escape for you, dear Florence; then we were to see you transferred to the barracks,

or, rather, one from the barracks transferred to Forest Lodge ;—one or two others I forget ; but, last of all, you are now positively, beyond all doubt and cavil, engaged to your cousin, Major Sinclair — the wedding-ring actually purchased at Mr. Lacker's the jeweller, in High Street—the wedding-day fixed either for the twenty-fifth day of this month, or the first of April,—which Miss Pringle declined positively to name, for some particular reason ; but on one of these two days she predicted the accomplishment of all your wishes was sure to be attained.”

Florence felt the blood creeping over her face at this announcement, and said, quickly—

“ This report has evidently arisen from my cousin purchasing a little present for me in Heddington last week.”

“ Ah ! there lies the confirmation, apparently strong — the cause of Sinclair's long stay at Forest Lodge,” remarked Ramsey, — “ his present being, I conclude, a ring ?”

“ Yes, Mr. Ramsey, it was a ring, as you suppose, containing a lock of his hair,” replied

Florence, "which," she added, very steadily, "I value most highly, having ever regarded him as a dear brother."

"Well, Miss Seaton, you see this verifies the old saying, that 'there can be no smoke without fire;' but our little friend Pringle will, I presume, make herself an April fool, unless, hearing of the Major's departure, she saves her credit by issuing another bulletin, that your marriage is postponed for a twelve-month, to allow him to sell out, and settle other family affairs."

Florence did not feel much pleased with Mr. Ramsey's remarks on this subject, which his wife observing, she rose, and, apologizing for their flying visit (Mrs. Seaton not having made her appearance, from a bad headache), took her leave.

In the privacy of her own room Florence read, rapidly at first, the contents of Fitzwarine's letter, written in the most affectionate terms, manifesting a more calm and resigned spirit than she had hitherto remarked in his correspondence. The conclusion was most affecting, placing his entire dependence on the

providence of the Almighty for their reunion. "Should it be otherwise ordained," he added, "my own dearest Florence, I have inclosed you a little miniature painting, executed by a clever artist—a fellow-passenger on board our vessel—which may, perhaps, remind you of your ever-constant and devoted Hugh Fitzwarine."

In a postscript he wrote of his leaving Calcutta as speedily as his arrangements were made for his tedious journey to the Himalaya Mountains, saying he had been promised every assistance by a friend of Macgregor's, to whom he had taken a letter of introduction. The most affecting passage of all was the last sentence contained in the letter, which ran thus :—

"Should any accident befall me, resulting in my earthly separation from you, whom I now consider my affianced wife, I shall, before leaving this place, make my will, bequeathing all my present and prospective property to your sole use and disposal. This document will be deposited in the bank here, and, should we never meet again, my own fondly-

cherished Florence, you will not refuse to comply with my last request in accepting this my last gift."

The tears of Florence fell fast as she read this most convincing proof of her lover's consideration and disinterested affection.

"Oh, Hugh!" she ejaculated, as she gazed on his picture, in which his happy, beaming smile was taken to the life, "could that scene be revealed to you, when I offered my hand to another, what would be your feelings now towards Florence Seaton? And yet, dear, generous Hugh, I know you will forgive me for those rash words, prompted by the impulse of the moment; my heart has been yours, and yours only; and may Heaven restore you to me again, to prove the sincerity of my undying love."

How often did Florence, that morning, retrace the lines penned by her lover's hand! how often scan the lineaments of his almost speaking likeness, by which the dear original was brought so vividly to her recollection! She sat for hours, that whole day, unsated by its contemplation, and her last look, before

retiring to rest, dwelt with lingering fondness on his picture.

The general tenor of Hugh's letter was highly consolatory to Florence, whose spirits were raised by the nearer prospect of his return; and as the weather had now become bright and cheering, she often took a solitary ramble in the glen, to the scene of her last parting with Hugh, where, on a rude seat constructed by his own hand, she would sit for hours meditating on the past—hopeful of the future.

She was thus occupied, one morning, apostrophizing his miniature, when, hearing a rustling close at her back, she turned suddenly round, and there beheld, to her dismay, the dark eyes of the recluse fixed almost fiercely upon her.

“Whose picture is that, Florence Seaton,” he asked, sternly, “which you would conceal from my sight? False and fickle as thy sex—so art thou—give me the bauble.”

Florence would have fled, terrified at his look and manner, but her trembling limbs made her powerless to move.

"False girl! you have cause to fear me, your heart condemns you for breaking that vow, witnessed by me on this very spot, to Hugh Fitzwarine."

"That vow," replied Florence, now roused to speak, "I have not broken."

"How then was your hand offered to Major Sinclair?"

Florence answered him not again, and her excessive agitation appeared to excite even his compassion, as he said in a more gentle tone—

"Rest, poor child, on that seat (from which she had now risen), you need not fear me—you inherit only your mother's weakness.—Come," he continued, holding out his hand, "let me see that picture."

She dared no longer refuse.

"Hah!" he exclaimed, with a sudden start on taking it, "Hugh Fitzwarine! how can you bear about you the semblance of him whose heart you would have broken? Here it will be safe" (placing it in his own bosom), "*I love Hugh Fitzwarine—him only.*"

"In mercy restore me his picture," cried

Florence, as Macgregor was turning away,—
“It is his present,—my only comfort in his absence ;” and clinging to his arm, she burst into tears.

“So young—so beautiful—yet so deceiving,” continued Macgregor, taking her hand, “tears are thy ever-ready weapons, oh! woman, to turn man’s purpose!—fools cannot resist them.—Well,” he said, in a pitying tone, “I will exchange the picture for this ring of Major Sinclair’s.”

“Take it,” she said, hastily, almost tearing it from her finger, “but first restore me that miniature.”

“It is yours once more, Florence Seaton,” he replied, giving it back, “but what shall I do with this ring?—trample it under foot, or send it Hugh Fitzwarine?”

“Do not send it him, unless you send its history also. I will explain all to him—nothing shall be concealed.”

“It is well, Florence Seaton, that I know all—more than you know. Henry Sinclair is a noble-minded man, yet not more noble than Hugh Fitzwarine: you may regard him as a

brother—he must be nothing more to you. Take back his present.”

Florence having expressed her thanks most gratefully as well as gracefully, the recluse added—

“Your path is open, why do you linger now?”

At first she hesitated, but was about to proceed, when he said—

“Stay, poor child, I will tell you the reason. Apprehension makes us bold as well as timorous. You dread my telling Hugh Fitzwarine what passed between yourself and Sinclair, for his sake if not for yours,—that secret is safe with me. I would not add to his present unhappiness one pang more, neither shall you. Men are jealous and suspicious, and it is well no other witnessed your impassioned grief that day, when, to spare Sinclair’s feelings, you would have sacrificed your own, and the happiness of Hugh Fitzwarine. A too soft, generous heart is yours, poor child; now go in peace—here is my pledge” (offering his hand) “that no word on this subject ever escapes my lips to another.”

As her still tearful eyes were raised to his face, expressing the gratitude she could not utter, Macgregor's heart melted also; he gazed wistfully on her soft, melancholy features, and still holding her hand in his, said—

“Fear not me, my child; your truest friend on earth is Macgregor. Seek me in time of trouble or distress; at any hour of the day or night, Florence Seaton shall be welcome.—Will you promise me this?” he asked, “for you will need a friend.”

“Yes,” she replied, “if you desire me, but to you we are already too much indebted.”

“How know you that?” he asked, almost sternly. “Might not the robber who stole your money restore it you again? Your mother believes it so, and trusts him still—why do not you?”

“I cannot,” she replied, “believe him capable of such an act, although only a just one. You are our secret benefactor, Mr. Macgregor—and no other.”

“You may *think* what you please, Florence

Seaton, but *say* not what you think to another, even to your own mother, on pain of my displeasure."

"I never have, and never shall," she replied, "but to you I must express my grateful thanks for your generosity."

"But I will not accept them," added the recluse, hastily, and turning from her he disappeared in the wood.

Florence, although dreadfully alarmed at first by Macgregor's knowledge of her interview with her cousin, had now regained her composure, fully assured of his silence on the subject; but how he could obtain his information puzzled her beyond measure, and her respect for him was increased by the mysterious knowledge he possessed of all her secret thoughts and actions. Again and again she asked herself the question—"Who can this strange being be, who takes so deep an interest in our welfare?" She could not ask this question of another, for with none had he been known to hold converse or communication save herself and Hugh Fitzwarine, and

so great was the awe with which he had inspired her, that had he been known to others, she would not have dared to make the enquiry of them—"Who is Macgregor?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE Ides of March were come—the assizes fast approaching, and busy rumour rife as to the fate of Herbert Franklyn. Among the ruined, by the failure of his father's bank, there was no compassion, for, by pleading guilty in one case, they thought him guilty in all; even pity was expressed for the old man, in possessing such a worthless son.

The opinion of the better-informed was, however, just the reverse. The family of Middleton were plunged into grief, anticipating the sentence to be pronounced on one recognized as the affianced husband of Caroline, over whom the blighting influence of despair

had now settled, and whom melancholy marked as its own. Poor Caroline, her joyous spirits all gone, and the brilliant damask of her cheeks exchanged for the sickly hue of broken health, reproached herself now for ever having given encouragement to Sir Everard Hilston, although only done with the purpose of punishing him for his conduct to her friend Florence. Even innocent provoked flirtation is a foolish game for a woman to play with any man, but with one of Sir Everard's character, it was attended with fearful results. He had discovered her attachment to Herbert Franklyn when foiled in his views, and, exasperated by her girlish amusement at his expense, his most bitter animosity was directed against her unfortunate lover, whom he hated intensely for being preferred to himself.

Newman, with other gentlemen in the neighbourhood, knowing Herbert Franklyn's true character, and that his admission of guilt had been made to screen his father, interested himself greatly in his favour, and an offer was made by them and Mr. Middleton to repay Sir Everard Hilston the money

he had lost ; and for this purpose, a deputation, headed by the mayor of Heddington and Chaffman, waited upon him, but their offer was politely, yet firmly, rejected by the *worthy* Baronet.

“Justice,” he remarked, “must take its course ; the poor have been defrauded, and many wholly ruined, as well as the rich ; an example ought to be made to deter others from the commission of such serious offences. He felt bound, as a magistrate for the county, not to interfere in such a case.”

Arguments and entreaties were used in vain ; Sir Everard was inexorable, and the deputation withdrew.

George Medwyn, also, at Chaffman’s instigation, tried every means to induce his friend Hilston to relent, having called the next day at Hawkwood for this purpose.

“You will oblige me personally in this matter,” he said, “to take back your money, and proceed no further against this young man, Hilston ; all say he is not capable of such an act, and I have promised some of my most influential supporters in the town to in-

tercede for him. My father also desires me to make the same request."

"I am grieved to refuse Lord Lessingham and yourself, Medwyn, but—"

"No buts, Hilston," he interrupted, quickly, "I will take no refusal; we are old school-fellows and friends, and if your money is made secure, it's all stuff about your sense of justice; that cock won't fight, old fellow."

"But it *will* fight, Medwyn, and I shall not give up my point to oblige you."

"Then there is some d—d revengeful feeling lurking in your heart, Hilston, because you could not have your way with Caroline Middleton—that's at the bottom of it all,—for I know you are deuced fond of money. Revenge is sweet, however, sweeter than gold in your case, I suppose."

"You are not to be the interpreter of my feelings, Mr. Medwyn," replied Hilston, turning pale with anger.

"But I know them well, too well, Sir Everard Hilston, to misunderstand the motives by which you are now actuated."

"You know how to spend money, Mr.

Medwyn, if I know how to keep it, and save for this lucky chance of being now a Member of Parliament, you had been a member of that respectable community in the Queen's Bench."

"And if you had your deserts, sir," retorted Medwyn, "the felons' ward in the county gaol had been your present abode for rape and seduction."

"Leave my house, sir, instantly!" screamed Sir Everard, ringing the bell furiously.

"Not before I please," was the reply.

"Then I will order my servants to turn you out!"

"Your whole household, headed by yourself, you arrant cur, cannot do it!" replied Medwyn.

At this moment a footman entered.

"Show Mr. Medwyn to the hall door!" cried Sir Everard, trembling with mixed passion and fear.

Medwyn, who was a tall, powerful man, and an accomplished boxer, stood immovable, a smile of contempt curling his upper lip.

“Turn that man out of my house!” vociferated Hilston.

“Come, Mr. Medwyn,” said the servant, to whom he was well known, “you had better leave, sir,” approaching him.

“I shall do so when and how I please, Thomas,” replied Medwyn, raising his hand; “touch me with your little finger, and you know the consequences.”

“What am I to do, sir?” asked the man, appealing to his master.

“Call for assistance, if you cannot do it yourself,” and again the bell, pulled by Sir Everard, rang through the servants’ hall, peal after peal, as if the house was on fire, when valet, butler, and another footman rushed into the room.

“Now, sir,” demanded Hilston, with a sneer, “will you leave my house, or be kicked out of it?”

“On compulsion I will not budge an inch,” replied the ex-Life Guardsman.

“Then out with him! turn him out!” cried Sir Everard, as the servants approached to seize him.

The butler, with whom he was no favourite, being foremost, made a dash at his cravat, which, with a handsome gold pin, remained in his hand—the buckle breaking as Medwyn sprang back to a corner of the room, when, as quick as thought, by two well-aimed blows, right and left, butler and second footman lay prostrate on the floor. Thomas, not relishing the idea of encountering Medwyn's fist, kept sparring at him out of distance, as if awaiting an opening to rush in; and the French valet, thinking this a rare opportunity for displaying his courage also, kept gesticulating and grimacing at Medwyn in like manner, but, like a cowardly cur at a badger-bait, barking and baying at a respectful distance.

Medwyn, detesting this man above all the household, pretended not to regard the Frenchman's manœuvres, apparently turning his attention to Thomas — Monsieur continued creeping a little nearer, thinking to steal a blow on Medwyn's ear—when, seeing him now within distance, the Life Guardsman sent his fist, straight from the shoulder, full on the valet's forehead, just above the nose. The

man did not stagger or fall, but was lifted up from the ground, as if shot through the heart, and sent by the force of the blow, like a cricket-ball, across the room against his master, both coming down together.

Sir Everard quickly recovered himself, but his valet lay motionless as a log of wood.

“You have killed my man!” screamed Sir Everard, “take him prisoner!—he’s a murderer!”

All stood aghast.

“It is your doing, you impetuous fool!” exclaimed Medwyn. “Did you think I would be baited like a bull by your myrmidons, and not fight in self-defence? Your butler there tore my cravat and pin from my neck. ‘The assault began on your side, and it shall end on mine, by serving every man of yours as that chattering Frenchman now lying on the hearth-rug. ‘Take him out, Thomas,’ he continued, in an authoritative tone, “and throw a basin of water over his face!”

The servants were too glad to obey.

“And now,” said Medwyn, as they were bearing him from the room, “I shall see that

man restored first to consciousness, and then leave your house."

"And I, Mr. Medwyn, shall expect a written apology for this outrage, or you must take the consequences."

"Oh! of course," replied Medwyn, with a low bow, "and I shall now do myself the honour of wishing Sir Everard Hilston good morning."

Medwyn, who possessed the disposition of the mastiff rather than the bull-dog, followed the valet to the butler's room, where he was soon brought round.

"Ah," muttered the Frenchman, "dat Monsieur Medwyn hit like de kick of a horse," feeling a large bump on his forehead.

"Then don't you get within range of my fist again," added Medwyn; "but there's something for a plaister," putting a sovereign in his hand; and turning away, he left the room.

There remained only two days now before the trial of Herbert Franklyn would take place, when Caroline Middleton, in her desperation, resolved, unknown to her family, to

seek an interview with Sir Everard Hilston, in the hope of inducing him to alter his purpose of prosecuting her lover ; and rising early in the morning, she set out alone on foot for Hawkwood. Instead of presenting herself at the front door, she went round to the back entrance ; her face being closely veiled, and giving another name, she told one of the servants she wished to see Sir Everard on particular business.

The man, from her dress and appearance, taking her for one of the tenants' daughters, showed her into the housekeeper's room, saying he would acquaint his master with her wishes, and in a short time she was ushered into his morning-room, where sat Sir Everard in dressing robe and slippers, sipping his coffee.

Rising on her entrance, he politely offered her a chair, and on the servant withdrawing (who by the way only closed the door, and stood listening outside), not noticing her agitation, he asked to whom he was indebted for the honour of this early visit. On raising her veil, the well-known features of Caroline Middleton were revealed to his astonished eyes.

“Miss Middleton” he exclaimed, in surprise, not unmingled with displeasure—“You here—and alone?”

“Yes, Sir Everard,” she replied, mournfully, “unknown to my family, I have come alone to intercede for my affianced husband.—Oh! spare him! save him—I implore you!”

“It is too late, Miss Middleton,” he answered, in a cold, apathetic tone.

“Oh! no—no!” she exclaimed, vehemently, “it is not too late! You can save him still, even at the last hour, by not appearing against him—Oh! spare him for my sake, as you hope for mercy yourself!” and she fell on her knees, raising her eyes streaming with tears to his face.

For a moment he remained irresolute, gazing in admiration on the beautiful being before him, his hard heart beginning to melt on beholding her agonized looks, when the thought of her suing for his rival turned his yielding compassion into gall.

“Rise, Miss Middleton,” he said, taking her hand, “you sue in vain for one you pre-

ferred to me ; you treated my love with contempt—how can you plead for one more favoured, who has robbed me of my money and my mistress too ?”

“ I was engaged to him before I knew you,” replied poor Caroline, “ his friends will repay you all you may have lost—Oh ! spare him, Sir Everard, and my everlasting gratitude shall be yours.”

“ There is one condition only, Caroline,” he said in a more subdued tone, “ on which I will yield to your wishes.”

“ Oh ! name it,” she exclaimed, as a ray of hope illumined for a moment her still beautiful, though care-worn features, “ tell me quickly what I can do to save him ?”

Taking her hand, he drew her to his side, whispering something in her ear that none else might hear. The words he spoke acted like an electric stroke upon her frame ; she sprang back from his touch with the bound of a fawn when suddenly startled ; for a second she stood surveying him with a look of her dark flashing eyes, in which horror, contempt, and offended modesty were con-

centrated, before which the craven-hearted sensualist quailed, and then, without speaking a word, she fled precipitately from the room.

For two miles she rather ran than walked along the road on her return home, when, exhausted by her unusual exertion of body and mind, she sank on the way-side bank, weeping bitterly. Here she had remained some twenty minutes, when, hearing carriage wheels approaching, she rose to proceed, drawing her veil closely around her face, in the hope of passing the carriage without recognition, when the well-known voice of Mr. Ramsey struck her ear.

“Miss Middleton!” he exclaimed in surprise, stopping short, “can it indeed be you?” and springing from the carriage, he was immediately at her side.

“I can divine the cause of your being on this road, dear Miss Middleton,” he continued, in the most soothing tones; “pray accept a seat by my side, and I will drive you home.”

Tears and sobs were the only answer she could return, as she allowed him to place her in the carriage.

“I have known grief and sorrow,” he continued in the same gentle tones, “let me sympathize with you in your distress. It is my duty, my dear Miss Middleton, not less, however, than the impulse of my heart, to speak peace to the troubled spirit—to mourn with those that mourn, and to pour the oil of comfort into the wounded breast. Unknown to you, I have been the joint sharer of your misery, for I have been taught to feel another’s woe. I gather from those swollen eyes, that the object you had in view has failed with that worldly man; still I must entreat you not to despair.—All feel for you and Herbert Franklyn, and no exertions of your friends will be spared to obtain at least a mitigation of the sentence which his noble resolution to shield his father will entail upon him. Pray regard me, dear Miss Middleton, as your sincere friend—as an elder brother.”

“Indeed,” she replied, “I do so already, from your kind, unwearied exertions in our behalf.”

“Then hope,” he said, “still hope, and trust in the mercy of God, without whose per-

mission not a sparrow falleth to the ground. Submit yourself wholly to his will, and like the aged Eli, let our answer be, when visited with afflictions—‘It is the Lord, let Him do what he seeth best.’ ”

With such language, during their drive home, did Ramsey recover poor Caroline from her hopeless despondency.

CHAPTER XV.

THE hour for the trial of Herbert Franklyn had arrived, and as he stood, pale and haggard, at the bar, a feeling of commiseration passed through the crowded court, for the anticipated fate of one so young and so generally respected by all classes in the neighbourhood. Amongst that dense mass of human beings stood Caroline Middleton, leaning on her father's arm. She had begged so earnestly to be there, that he could not refuse the earnest request of his almost broken-hearted child.

On the indictment being read, and the

question asked, "How say you, Guilty or not guilty?" the prisoner answered, in a low tone, "Guilty."

"What does he say?" asked the judge, who was evidently interested, and had probably heard the rumours in circulation respecting Herbert Franklyn.

"Guilty, my Lord," was the answer.

"You had better re-consider your plea, prisoner," the judge remarked, in a mild tone.

"I can make no other," replied Franklyn, sadly, "although deeply obliged by your Lordship's consideration of my unfortunate position."

"My Lord," said one of the leading counsel, rising, "I have been retained by the friends of the prisoner to defend his cause, and regret most deeply that, notwithstanding my advice and entreaties to the contrary, he has positively declined to avail himself of my services. My Lord, I lament the more the course this young man has determined to pursue, because I feel as convinced of his innocence of this grave offence as I am myself."

"Prisoner at the bar," asked the judge, "do you still persist in your plea of 'guilty' after what your counsel has stated?"

Herbert Franklyn bowed his head low, but no word passed his lips. For a moment a deathlike silence reigned through the court, when a female voice, in piteous accents, was heard.

"Oh! spare him, my Lord, he is indeed innocent—ask him on his oath if he is guilty of this crime."

Herbert Franklyn turned his head quickly round to whence the voice proceeded; it was instantly hushed, and the fainting form of Caroline Middleton was borne from the court in her father's arms. A deep sensation was caused by this event—the women shedding tears; and the Judge, not unmoved himself by the scene, said, hastily—

"Remove the prisoner—I shall pronounce sentence to-morrow."

No sooner had the judge uttered these words, than Ramsey, rushing from the court to the inn where Mr. Middleton had conveyed his daughter, hastened to inform her of the result.

“Hope still, dear Caroline,” he said, taking her cold hand in his—“sentence is deferred, and from the Judge’s feeling, noticed by all in court, in this strange case, I am sure it will be a mild one. Let us be thankful for this mercy.”

The spirits of the poor girl revived by Ramsey’s assurance, and she returned home with her father in a more resigned state of mind.

On the following day, when Herbert Franklyn was again placed at the bar to receive sentence, his counsel rose, and addressing the Judge, said—

“I think it my duty, my Lord, to state, in mitigation of punishment, that the prosecutor in this case consented to forego proceedings against the prisoner on the condition that the young lady to whom he is engaged should consent to a most dishonourable proposition.”

“No evidence has been brought forward in this extraordinary case,” replied the Judge, “on either side, and I cannot listen to mere assertions of this kind.”

“My Lord,” replied the counsel, “I have

stated a fact which came to my knowledge only last night ; but I pledge my reputation as a barrister, and my word as a gentleman, to prove the truth of what I have said." He then resumed his seat.

Great excitement pervaded the court at this announcement, followed by hisses and murmurs of disapprobation ; and when silence was proclaimed, the Judge said—

"This case appears enveloped in such mystery, that I cannot consistently, with my views of justice, pass a severe sentence on the prisoner, which, had the charge been fully proved, I should have felt it my duty to do, for an offence of this grave nature. The sentence of the court, therefore, is, that he be imprisoned for three years."

The countenance of Herbert Franklyn, who evidently expected a more severe punishment, underwent a momentary change, from settled despair to a sickly smile, and bowing low to the Judge, he was removed from the bar.

By the Middletons and his other friends, who dreaded transportation, this sentence was received with thankfulness for the greater evil

averted, and a ray of hope once more lit up the features of Caroline, who had given up Herbert Franklyn as lost to her for ever. She would now be permitted to see him sometimes in company with her father, to whom the governor of the prison was well known ; and his other friends might also have access to him, to alleviate his misery of mind, and cheer him in his confinement.

Soon after the trial of Herbert Franklyn, the affairs of the Heddington bank were wound up, the estate only paying three shillings in the pound ; but Prospect Place, with the adjoining lands, having been purchased with Mrs. Franklyn's money, and settled upon herself and children, remained to the family, with a certain sum in the funds also, sufficient to support them in decency and comfort.

The fate of his son, however, hung heavily on the old man's heart, and we must do him the justice to state that it was with the greatest reluctance he had been prevailed upon by his legal advisers to permit his child to stand in that degraded position which he alone ought to have occupied, and undergo that pun-

ishment which should have been awarded to himself. For prudential reasons he had been compelled by his solicitor, as well as implored by his son, to act as he had done, on which we may say more hereafter.

It is almost superfluous to add that, from the revelation made at the trial by Franklyn's counsel, general disgust was expressed at Sir Everard's unmanly and unprincipled behaviour to poor Caroline Middleton, and corresponding commiseration for her lover ; although Hilston, among his esteemed friends, Bertie and others of that libertine order, was rather applauded for the act, who said—"Under the circumstances, he had made a d—d good offer to the girl."

Undeterred by any feeling of shame for his exposure in open court, Sir Everard Hilston still pursued the uneven tenor of his way, secretly rejoicing in the humiliation of one he had once pretended to regard with love and esteem.

About two miles from Hawkwood, which was surrounded by a large park, lay a tract of unreclaimed moorland, through which an old

road, now little used, passed, leading to the town of Heddington. This tract was the favourite route of Sir Everard when on horse-back, as affording good galloping ground, and being a shorter distance to the town.

On returning home one afternoon, about a fortnight after the assizes, a gipsy girl of surpassing beauty, her bonnet thrown back on her shoulders, over which her long, black, glossy hair hung in luxuriant profusion, sat on the way-side bank knitting, and at a short distance, in a small glen, sheltered on the north and east by two high hills, lay the tent of her tribe. This descendant of Hagar appeared too intent on her work, or too much occupied with her own thoughts, to bestow much attention on passers-by; but her furtive glance, as his horse neared the bank on which she was sitting, did not escape Sir Everard's notice, or the dark flashing eye from which it proceeded. Suddenly checking his rein, he accosted her by asking if she could tell his fortune, when, at his voice, the faultless features of her upturned face were fully revealed, and with the graceful elasticity of youth, she step-

ped from the bank to comply with his desire.

Her figure and face were cast in nature's true mould, and her dress, neat and clean, bespoke one above the common class of gipsies. Sir Everard dismounting, offered his ungloved hand for her acceptance, which she scarcely touched, and with her eyes riveted on the palm, said—

“ You have had many loves, but not to one have you proved true, and will never marry one of your own class.”

“ Is this all you can tell me ?” he asked.

“ And is it not enough ?” she enquired, “ too much, that you despise the law of nature and of God. Each fowl of the air and beast of the field finds one single mate for himself, but the lion links not with the leopardess, although both are of kindred kind. By your hand you are of gentle blood ; seek one in wedlock among your equals.”

“ Beauty is confined to no particular class,” he replied, “ I have never seen one more lovely than yourself.”

“ To such language I may not listen if I

would," was her answer, and springing on the bank, she walked quickly towards the tent. Sir Everard called after her, but she turned not her head, and fearing to follow her, he mounted his horse and rode leisurely away.

The next day, at the same hour, Hilston revisited the place, and there sat the gipsy girl, on the same bank, and in the same neat dress.

"You would not accept my offering yesterday," he said, approaching her, and tendering a gold coin for her acceptance. "Take it," he said, seeing her hesitation, "as a small token of gratitude for your good advice yesterday. Why do you sit here in this lonely place, when there are so many more beautiful spots close at hand, from which you may look down on the green valleys below?"

"My father and mother live in the tent yonder, and do not like to trust me far out of their sight."

"No doubt," he continued, "they are careful about their beautiful daughter; but do they keep watch over you all day long?"

“No,” she replied ; “ in the evening they go down to the village to buy provisions.”

“ You do not live on plunder then, as I fear too many of your tribe do ?”

“ The true descendants of Ishmael live not by such means as these,” she replied, haughtily, her dark eyes flashing with anger ; “ my father and mother work baskets and other things for sale, my two brothers deal in horses, and I can add some little to the common stock, as you see, by knitting stockings.”

“ I meant not to offend you,” Sir Everard said, “ but if you will knit for me a dozen pair of such as you now hold in your hand, I shall feel much obliged.”

“ It will take some time to work so many ; our tent may be struck, and all far away before they could be finished.”

“ Do you leave this place then so soon ?” he enquired.

“ I cannot tell you when or where we go ; perhaps to-morrow you may not find us here.”

“ Then will you meet me this evening at sunset, by that stunted thorn yonder ?” he said, “ for I have something to offer you as a

parting gift—we may not, perhaps, ever meet again.”

“I will not promise to meet you there,” she answered, and on hearing a shrill whistle, darted towards the tent.

“What hadst thou to say to that proud Saxon?” demanded her father, as she stood before him in obedience to his summons.

“He asked me to knit him some stockings, father.”

“Wherewith to weave thy own ruin, child,—but have thou nothing to say or do with the Canaanites among whom we dwell. We will not give our daughters to them in marriage, even would they ask them at our hands, but they are far too proud for that. Beware thou trust them not to thy disgrace, for thou art fair to look upon, Hagar; my blessing shall descend only upon thy union with one of thy own tribe.”

The father ceased speaking, and Hagar, meekly bowing her head, withdrew from his presence, seating herself outside the tent, with her work in hand.

Curiosity, fatal to the first parent of the

human race, led this child of the desert to meet the tempter at his appointed spot that evening, when her parents had left the tent. Sir Everard was there, and leading her a few paces further, within the shade of an adjoining plantation, he conducted her to a seat on a fallen tree, from whence a full view of the valley beneath could be obtained. Here, seating himself by her side, he drew forth a handsome gold brooch, studded with rubies, which, placing it in her hand, he begged her to accept, as a token of respect for her modesty and beauty; and as she gazed with childish pleasure on the jewel in her hand, this serpent in human shape breathed into her ear that soft language of love in which he was so well versed.

The trinket had found its place in her pocket, and her hand been held in his only a few seconds, when a shrill whistle, piercing through the glen, startled her from her seat.

“I must go,” she said quickly, “detain me not,” as he still held her hand.

“One embrace,” he whispered, pressing her

suddenly to his side, and snatching a kiss from her lips.

With a sudden bound she sprang from his arms, and fled like a roe-deer across the moor.

“Whence comest thou, Hagar?” asked her father angrily, as she stood with trembling limbs before him.

“From the hill above,” she answered; “you bid me not sit by the wayside.”

“It is well,” he replied, “but you must not leave the tent during our absence.”

For several evenings Sir Everard repaired to the little plantation by the side of the hill, where he had last parted with the gipsy girl; but Hagar was not there, neither when passing the tent on the highway did he again see her sitting on the bank as before. Rendered desperate by disappointment, Sir Everard watched one evening from the overhanging hill, until he saw the two elder gipsies leave their tent, wending their way towards the village below, when he hastily descended, and there found Hagar at her usual employment, sitting at the entrance.

On seeing him she sprang to her feet, the blood flushing through her cheek, as she asked, quickly—

“What do you here, rash man? Our last meeting is suspected by my father and brothers,—fly this instant, or you bring destruction on your head.”

“I will not go,” he replied, firmly, “unless you promise to meet me once more to-morrow night.”

“I dare not do so,” she said, impatiently.—
“Quick, begone!”

Still he moved not, when, fearing detection, she said quickly—

“Leave me directly, without another word, and I will do as you wish—linger another moment here, and I leave you to your fate. Go down the ravine,” she added, pointing out his path, “at the bottom of the plantation, there you will find me to-morrow evening.”

Sir Everard observing her impatience, and fearing the return of some of her family, walked rapidly away, and was soon lost to sight. The gipsy girl breathed more freely when his retreating form disappeared from

view, and her young heart beat audibly, with a rapid pulsation, as she thought of the danger he had just escaped, when her brother suddenly made his appearance from behind the tent. No remark, however, about her visitor escaped his lips.

True to his appointment, as the sun disappeared behind the far distant hills, Sir Everard, taking now a circuitous route, reached the place of assignation. Hagar was not there. He waited impatiently for half an hour, still she came not. Darkness was closing in around him, and Sir Everard, beginning to be alarmed, drew a pistol from his pocket as a footstep caught his ear. The next moment the light form of Hagar stood before him—she was clasped immediately in his arms.

“Hush!” she whispered, “I could not come before, my brother has been watching me—now fly—farewell—we leave to-morrow, and can never meet again.”

“You shall never leave me, Hagar,” he said passionately—“You shall be mine—my own—I am rich, every luxury in life shall be yours, servants and attendants to wait your

wishes, the finest silks and satins to cover that matchless form, and diamonds and pearls to deck those raven tresses."

"Would you take me as your wife," she said, "one of our despised race?"

"Yes," he replied, "as my wife you shall be in all things. Come," he said, "why do you hesitate? Let us fly at once this spot."

"No," she replied, sadly, "I cannot leave my father's tent, a curse would fall upon me."

"He shall have sheep and cattle to graze on this mountain, all his own, for it is mine to bestow. Your father will bless instead of cursing you, Hagar. Come, dearest," he whispered, throwing his arm round her waist, "come, let us go."

She was still faintly struggling to release herself from his arms, and evade the burning kisses on her cheeks, although from a complication of different feelings at that moment powerless to resist any further, when a blow was dealt from behind, which in an instant caused Sir Everard to relax his hold, and he fell with a deep groan at *her* feet whose ruin he had so nearly accomplished. With a

scream like that of a frightened curlew, she fled instantly from the spot ; for, where her betrayer had so lately stood, there the dark form of her elder brother now met her bewildered vision.

The non-return of Sir Everard that night caused no concern to his domestics, as he was in the habit of occasionally absenting himself in this manner at a villa residence, about a mile and a half distant from the park ; but when another day and night had passed without his appearance, the servants became alarmed and the head keeper was despatched on his pony to make enquiries at the aforesaid villa. Sir Everard had not been seen there for more than a week ; some labourers, however, on the adjoining farm, informed the keeper that they had met his master the evening before last, when getting dusk, walking by himself very fast on the footpath towards the village of Fernhill, in the bourne (this lay in the opposite direction to the gipsy camp), through which flowed a deep stream, fed by the mountain rills. Here the keeper made enquiries also at nearly every cottage and the

farm-houses near—no one had seen his master. There was a long, rickety foot-bridge of planks across the stream, before entering the village, even by daylight very hazardous to pass over ; Sir Everard might have fallen in, and been carried away by the current, which was then running rapidly. The river was dragged for a mile, down to the next mill. Some large pike and trout were pulled out, but Sir Everard was not amongst the fish. They searched for him through the woods and hills, with no better success :—

“ They sought him by night,
They sought him by day,
They sought him in vain,
Till a week passed away.”

His London agent was written to, and his only brother, the next in succession to the property, arrived in hot haste at Hawkwood ; advertisements were inserted in all the local papers, and rewards offered for the discovery of Sir Everard, dead or alive. By the way, the younger brother, who was but badly off in proportion to the elder, did not see the necessity for these advertisements being con-

tinued beyond a week. Nothing was heard of Sir Everard, and his brother quietly maintained his post at the park, to await the issue whether any tidings of him might arrive.

The sudden disappearance of Sir Everard Hilston caused great astonishment among his neighbours, and throughout the country, but nothing more ; and it afforded a good week's work to Miss Pringle, who, in trotting about from house to house, with all the tittle-tattle afloat respecting this extraordinary event, wore out an extra pair of shoes, and her tongue was fairly tired out at last with the oft-repeated sayings—"Have you heard—did you ever—no, I never."

CHAPTER XVI.

IN the interval between Franklyn's commitment to prison and his trial, Newman became a very frequent visitor at the Vicarage, apparently sympathising with the family and Caroline, but, in reality, attracted there from a different motive. Miss Middleton was handsome and accomplished, with pleasing manners, generally admired, and reported to have been left by an aunt some six or seven thousand pounds in the funds. Whether he was influenced more by the person or metal, we will not at present stop to enquire—perhaps by both ; but having, from his age, obtained the reputation of a confirmed bachelor,

Newman's visits and frequent walks with Miss Middleton occasioned no uneasiness in the minds of her parents, or the most remote suspicion as to his true intentions; and from his appearance and manners, they thought him the last person in the world to make the slightest impression on their daughter's heart, who had always moved in good society, and refused several advantageous offers. Miss Middleton had, on his first introduction to the family, regarded him with feelings of aversion, his manners being such as she had been little accustomed to. On nearer acquaintance, he was tolerated for his apparent good-humour and candour; and now, from his deep expressions of sympathy for her sister, he had won her esteem, on account of his supposed kind and charitable disposition.

We cannot help liking a dog, however ugly, which attaches himself to us, and follows our footsteps; and from a similar feeling I suppose women are taken by the attentions of a plain man, in whom they think they have discovered good qualities of heart or mind, by many of the gentler sex far more highly esteemed than

a prepossessing exterior. By close intimacy, personal imperfections, and even deformities, become daily less perceptible to the eye, and it is strange how, by frequent communion with persons of less refined manners and ideas, we are led by slow degrees almost to reverse our first impressions. The cause of this change may be attributed partly to vanity (we cannot help liking those who profess to like us), and partly to a natural inclination to adapt ourselves to the manners of those with whom we hold constant intercourse.

Thus, Sarah Middleton, at first shrinking from the coarse language and unrefined manners of Newman, became gradually less struck by them, from her increasing regard for his supposed amiability; and he, perceiving the advantage he had already gained, continued his attentions until he had actually made some impression on her heart, that is, she pitied him. The village of Stanmore being very secluded, and no unmarried gentleman residing there, Miss Middleton, it must be admitted, led rather a solitary life, to which young ladies are by no means partial, nor, I

may add, old ones either. She had now attained her twenty-fourth year, and women will not believe, although it is certainly the case, that at this age they are generally more attractive than at an earlier period of life—and why should the case be otherwise? At twenty-four a woman is in the zenith of her charms, more matured in mind and beauty of person than a girl of eighteen or nineteen, and more captivating, therefore, to men of sense. Newman, having passed the meridian of his days, thought it a feather in his cap to be seen dancing attendance on a handsome woman of good family, a connection with whom would afford him an entrance into better society, in which at present he felt himself tolerated, not received as one of themselves.

The worthy Vicar, when unaccompanied by Caroline, took his solitary walk through the village, or elsewhere—so did Miss Middleton, after luncheon, “over the hills and far away.” Now it so happened, the path generally chosen by her led close by the Bower, the occupier of which, with his primitive notions, or with an economical view, dined at one precisely, so

that the cooking of one dinner sufficed for master and domestics—the latter comprising a housekeeper and cook, &c., in one, and a hard lad to clean knives, shoes and boots, look after pony and carriage, and occupy his spare time in the garden. The aforesaid occupier of the Bower, having despatched his early meal, and adopting the old usage of “after dinner sit awhile,” seated in his arm chair opposite the window, awaited the flitting vision of Sarah Middleton, which, having allowed to pass a certain time, that he might not be supposed to follow her, Newman emerged from his den, taking a short cut across the fields which led into the path selected by the lady; and it often happened that they met at the entrance of a picturesque wood, on the outskirts of the village, to which the old women and children resorted to pick sticks for their fires. One of the former, more curious than the others, having watched the meetings of this ill-matched pair in the wood, communicated her suspicions to Miss Pringle, that “the old bachelor was bent upon getting Miss Sarah for his wife;” but Miss

Pringle, although, as a general rule, taking "all fish that came to the net" in the way of gossip, thought this a crab to catch herself, and therefore resolved to have ocular demonstration.

Now, on the summit of this wooded hill, there was a large rugged stone or rock, against which a bench had been placed for the use of visitors to this romantic spot. Behind this huge stone Miss Pringle took up her position about three o'clock one fine afternoon, and after peering and peeping for some time down the pathway, she at last saw the objects of her curiosity slowly ascending to the place of her concealment. "This will never do," she thought, "they will certainly look round the stone before sitting down;" so slipping quickly back to an old ivy-clad tree, a few paces beyond, on the bank declining to the other side of the hill, where her body was quite concealed from view of those approaching the upward pathway—she watched the lovers approach, and sure enough the old bachelor made a careful survey of the rock all round before taking his seat, which Miss Pringle felt sure

he would do directly, to be satisfied that no eavesdroppers were near.

Creeping on tiptoe, and carefully avoiding every stick or dry leaf which might cause alarm, with the stealthy step of a cat the gossip-hunter now approached the rock, and applying her ear to a crevice in it, she could hear distinctly what passed between Newman and Miss Sarah ; and this being the time and place chosen by him to venture on a proposal, Miss Pringle having heard enough from both to ratify an engagement, began stepping back cautiously, but not making allowance for the sudden declivity of the ground, she fell backwards, rolling some paces down the bank.

“What’s that?” cried Newman, springing quickly to his legs, and running round the rock, “I heard the sticks crackle.” A rotten bough at that moment fell before him from the tree above his head, and looking up, he saw a squirrel hopping among the branches.

“Only that squirrel,” he remarked to Miss Middleton, who stood trembling at his side, “nothing more, my dear Sarah, so we may resume our seat.”

Listeners, it is said, seldom hear any good of themselves, and allusions made by Miss Sarah to a certain little ugly old gossip had reached Miss Pringle's ears, not at all complimentary to her. Now if there is one name which old ladies more particularly dislike when applied to themselves, whether meriting it or not, it is the epithet of *old*; but to be called old and ugly too, was an insult of the most gross kind to our little spinster, who, after extricating herself from a furze bush into which she had rolled, her temper not improved by a large rent in her second-best gown, muttered —“Ah! Miss Sarah, with your high and mighty airs, your mamma shall know of your goings on with that old bachelor, as old as your father. Ugly, indeed! just look at the man of your choice, Miss Sarah. Isn't he as ugly as an ogre? he, he, he!”

The following afternoon, when Miss Middleton had set out for her walk, our little gossip stepped up to the vicarage, and there found Mrs. Middleton at her usual worsted work. After the accustomed salutations and enquiries

as to the health of the whole family, Miss Pringle rushed *in medias res*—

“So, my dear Mrs. Middleton, I find we are to have a wedding very shortly in the village.”

“I have not heard of any likely to take place,” replied the lady appealed to, very quietly.

“Indeed!” said Miss Pringle, in apparent surprise, “why, my dear friend, it is all over the parish that your daughter, Miss Sarah, is going to marry Mr. Newman.”

The needle dropped from Mrs. Middleton’s hands at these words, and she looked for a moment in utter amazement at her visitor, repeating her words, “My daughter going to marry Mr. Newman—impossible, Miss Pringle, you are jesting.”

“Oh! no, I assure you, my dear friend, Mr. Newman has certainly proposed to Miss Middleton, and been accepted by her. I have this from the very best authority; but you can of course ascertain the truth by asking Miss Sarah herself. Sorry to find the news so disagreeable—thought you knew all about

it—obliged to call at the Abbey this afternoon, must make you a short visit—good-bye ;” and off hustled Miss Pringle, to escape further questions, leaving her *dear friend* in a high state of nervous agitation.

On Miss Middleton’s return, her mother followed her to her room, and then told her of the report made by Miss Pringle.

“Surely this cannot be true, my dear Sarah,” she asked ; “you can never think seriously of such a person as Mr. Newman ?”

“Why not, dear mamma ? He has been so very kind and attentive to us all, and he is so amiable, that one cannot help liking him ; and you and papa always speak of him in high terms.”

“Liking and loving a man are very different feelings, my dear Sarah ; we like him very well as a neighbour, and believe him to be all you say, as far as we can judge, a kind-hearted and honourable man ; but, my love, he is not certainly the person we should desire for a son-in-law—we could never have imagined such a thing possible, and even you used to say you could not endure his coarse

manners, and that he was not fitted for ladies' society."

"Yes, dear mamma, these were my first impressions, certainly; but he is greatly improved, and he has now become so devotedly attached to me, that he says he cannot live if I refuse him."

"Then he really has proposed?" asked her mother in surprise.

"Yes, dearest mamma; and he was so distressed, so agitated by his deep feelings, shedding tears all the while, that I could not reject him; he declared he had never loved anyone before he saw me, and that he never could survive a refusal from my lips."

"I really gave you credit, Sarah, for more sense, than to listen complacently to such trash, which one might expect from a boy in his first romantic love; but coming from a man of Mr. Newman's age, as old as your father, it is quite sickening. I believed him too upright and truthful to try and dupe you in this manner, for it is not very likely that you are the first woman he has ever loved."

“He has assured me so, mamma, and I believe him.”

“Then I do not, my dear ; but he has won upon your soft feelings, and knowing woman’s nature—not imperfectly, as you suppose—has excited sympathy and compassion in your heart for his supposed desolate condition ; but it is only a short time since you expressed yourself disgusted with his manners at table—licking up his gravy with his knife—and other such habits, inconsistent with the rules of genteel society.”

“Well, mamma, I admit his manners require improvement ; but then he has been living so long secluded at the Bower, without ladies’ society, that we must make charitable allowances for such eccentricities.”

“Eccentricities, indeed !” exclaimed Mrs. Middleton indignantly, “vulgarisms you ought to say ; and have you not constantly remarked on another eccentricity, as you call it, his address to ladies—yes, mum—no, mum—the fact is as clear as the day, Mr. Newman has never mixed in genteel society ; but it is necessary, if you persist in your folly—insanity

I may call it—that your father should make some enquiries about his family, and his fortune also ; whether he has the means of making any settlement upon a wife.”

“ Of the last I am quite satisfied, mamma, since he declared to me he would not act so dishonourably to any lady, as to propose without having it in his power to make a handsome settlement upon her. He assured me he had a good estate in Yorkshire, besides money in the funds.”

“ He does not live like a man that possessed either ; but it appears, my dear Sarah, you have been discussing all these matters together, as if Mr. Newman had already obtained your father’s approval of his marriage with you, whereas he has never addressed him on the subject. This, Sarah, is decidedly most dishonourable and ungrateful conduct, after your father’s kindness and hospitality to him.”

“ Oh ! indeed, mamma, he means to do so, and will speak to papa the first opportunity,” pleaded Sarah.

“ He will not be admitted here again till he has done so,” replied Mrs. Middleton, “ and

in the meantime I must request you will not be seen walking with him again."

The surprise of Mr. Middleton when made acquainted with Mr. Newman's conduct, in entangling his daughter into an engagement with him before speaking to her parents on the subject, was far greater than that of his wife, as he considered it a flagrant breach of hospitality, as well as of all honourable principle, in thus clandestinely gaining her affections.

"We know nothing of this man," exclaimed Mr. Middleton, "literally nothing—he came a stranger to the village, and we have often remarked (our daughters more than ourselves) his *gaucherie* of mien and manners; but now that he has actually proposed to Sarah, it is my duty to make enquiries about him, and I trust you will speak seriously to her on the subject, as, independent of fortune, I could never approve of him as a son-in-law."

Mrs. Middleton used arguments and entreaties, in vain, to alter her daughter's determination. Miss Sarah maintained she was of an age to judge for herself, and would

not be dictated to ; and thus matters went on for a few days, when Mr. Newman, instigated by Miss Sarah, sought an interview with her father. His explanations were so unsatisfactory, and his evasion of direct questions so frivolous, that Mr. Middleton insisted on receiving documentary proofs of his alleged power of making a settlement on his daughter, adding, "Until satisfied on this point, you cannot expect my sanction to your addresses, or further attentions to my daughter, which must be discontinued."

"Oh, certainly not, my dear sir," replied Mr. Newman ; "all the information you require shall be forwarded to you by my solicitor," and with this undertaking he withdrew.

A fortnight passed without any information being received at the Vicarage touching Mr. Newman's affairs, who still continued his afternoon walks with his daughter, notwithstanding her mother's remonstrances, and Mr. Newman's breach of faith.

"I am now thoroughly convinced, Sarah," she said one day, "that the man you have so foolishly chosen, has neither honesty of pur-

pose, nor any honourable feeling ; and were he ever so rich, we can never consent to his being your husband."

"I suppose, mamma," said Sarah, giving way to her temper, "I am old enough to know my own mind, and choose for myself?"

"Certainly, my dear, we only advise for your good ; but we never would believe you could encourage any man to act defiantly and contemptuously towards your father and mother," with which Mrs. Middleton left the room.

This reproof went home to the daughter's heart ; for kind and indulgent had her parents ever been to Sarah Middleton.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE must now take a cursory review of what had been passing at Belvidere, where Bertie's indifference to his wife had led to a total severance of all regard or respect for her husband, his insulting behaviour to her, even in the presence of company, added to his constant flirtation with her cousin, having eradicated the last spark of love or passion. One bond of union alone held them together under the same roof—her two children—and this is a link which women of the most depraved feelings will not hastily sever. It was from a feeling of offended dignity, coupled with resentment for her husband's conduct, which

first induced her to encourage Willoughby's attentions. She regarded him at first as a mere youth, whom she might use as she pleased to excite her husband's jealousy; but unfortunately he did not possess any jealous feelings—he did not love his wife sufficiently to be jealous of her. He was neither angry nor annoyed now at her flirting with Willoughby or any other man—he had gone too far with Julia to admit of his making any complaint on this head. She proposed a separation on the condition of his giving up the children to her care. He would not hear of it. “These were his own children, he believed,” was his sneering reply—for any others he would not answer, and he should therefore keep these two. By taunts and insults such as these, her very nature was changed from dove-like gentleness into corvine fierceness.

Anguish of mind, as well as severe bodily pain, is heavy to bear at any time, much heavier when borne alone—we look around for others to help in easing the burden. Mrs. Bertie had neither mother, sister, nor any female

friend to sympathise in her distress, or assist her with advice. She feared to tell her father more than she had already told him, which had elicited the cold reply, that having made her choice of a husband, she must make the best she could of him ; as he had before her marriage expressed his disapprobation of the man, whom he designated as a vain, frivolous Frenchman. Willoughby alone appeared to feel for her, and into his willing ear were poured her complaints and wrongs. She could not have chosen a worse counsellor,—he had his own object to gain—his own selfish ends to gratify.

The friendship of young men for women means love or passion.

Julia Arundel had, by her beauty, arts, and beguilements, gained a complete ascendancy over Bertie, who was no less enraptured by her charms than delighted with her wit and sprightly humour. She was also a superior musician, one of the greatest recommendations to his favour.

“ Ah ! Julia,” he exclaimed one day, “ *you* ought to have been the mistress of Belvidere,

instead of your cousin, who is far too tame and English in her ideas to suit my taste."

"Well," she said with a coquettish air, "I might perhaps have suited you rather better; but now you must be satisfied with your lot."

"Indeed, I shall not," he replied, "and I think Willoughby will soon enable me to make a second choice; in that case, Julia, may I expect you will not say nay?"

"I scarcely know yet," she replied with an arch look; "but you need not wholly despair; perhaps I might feel compassion for you, if I saw you very, very miserable."

With these views in perspective, it was not very surprising to find Miss Julia carefully evading interference with her cousin's and Willoughby's arrangements, in singing duets at the piano, walks in the shrubbery together, or *tête-à-têtes* in the library. But this artful girl set a watch over them in the person of her maid, an Argus-eyed damsel, as artful, and nearly as good-looking as her mistress.

Things were thus in train, when Bertie gave another grand entertainment at Belvidere, theatricals and *tableaux vivans*, to conclude as

before with dancing, and to which all the neighbouring families were invited.

Sinclair was at that time at Forest Lodge, and escorted Mrs. Seaton and Florence to this party, where he met all the officers from the barracks, two of whom, Carleton and Wilmoughby, took parts in the performance of the evening ; and Major Mercer's remarks to Sinclair about Mrs. Bertie and the latter gave him an insight into the state of affairs.

"To tell you the truth, Sinclair, and you are a man of discretion, this is a very queer lot altogether—master, mistress, and visitors—and between ourselves, a house in which no young girl could stay without incurring a blemish on her character ; but that does not concern bachelors or military men—only take care your cousin does not accept any invitation to remain even one night under this roof."

"Are things really so bad?" enquired Sinclair in a whisper.

"Yes," was the response, "worse than I dare tell you now."

Soon after, Sinclair was speaking to Mrs. Seaton in a low tone, the purport of which

might be divined by an occasional high movement of the lady's head.

It was on this evening that Mrs. Bertie's indignation was excited to the highest point by finding her husband assisting at Miss Julia's toilet in her own room, when preparing for the stage, and her flushed cheeks, and wild looks, were generally noticed by her guests during that eventful night, when smarting under the sense of this fresh insult, so galling to a wife's feelings, Mrs. Bertie consented to leave his roof with Willoughby.

The world judges harshly of delinquent married women—sometimes perhaps too harshly without a knowledge of their provocations; but thousands, devoid of religious principles, are deterred by fear of the world's censure or worldly considerations from openly violating their marriage vows. Were every woman, however, before accepting a proposal, seriously and attentively to read through the service of our church appointed for the marriage ceremony, many would be restrained from rushing precipitately into a state so solemn and imposing to every reflecting mind. Here they

swear at the altar of God to love, honour, and obey a man they do not perhaps love, and cannot honour. But supposing they do love, have they allowed themselves sufficient time to enquire whether he is a character they can also honour? The discovery is made too late after marriage, that they cannot honour and obey till death may intervene to separate them, the person so rashly chosen to be their husband.

To the worldly-minded and irreligious, the marriage ceremony is a means to an end; and many who would be startled at the idea of taking a false oath, will nevertheless take this solemn vow—never perhaps known or thought of until read by the officiating clergyman; and no doubt compunction and misgivings of heart have often arisen in the breast of many a fair daughter of Eve, when this solemn adjuration has first struck her ear:—

“I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed,” &c., &c. Are there not many who cannot love the man they are about to swear to love,

because they already love another? Others who from mercenary motives love not the man, but his money? Others instigated by parents and friends to entail this solemn obligation on themselves, from which none can release them, and none can help to bear the burden? Better, a thousand times better and happier the lot of her who prefers a state of singleness to incurring such risks and responsibilities as these!

Marriage is justly called a lottery, from whose revolving wheel few prizes come forth; and were this impressed on the minds of young girls, we should see more happiness in the married state.

Mr. Bertie's entertainment passed off as such usually do,—more to the amusement of the entertained than the entertainers; for few things are more disagreeable than turning your house topsy-turvy to please your neighbours and friends, who, by the way, often express themselves anything but pleased with your silly attempts to cater for their various tastes.

“Well, Medwyn,” asked Major Mercer, when the company had adjourned to the ball-

room, "what do you think of the theatricals to-night?"

"Slow, sir, very slow,—wanted spirit, Mercer,—too stiff by half. Men tolerable—women *in-ditto*, except that little bewitching d—l in petticoats, Julia Arundel, who sings like a syren, and acts like an enchantress upon a man's feelings. By Jove, Mercer, there's a wife for you! Furbish you up, Major, like a new silver cup!"

"Egad, Medwyn, I suspect she would take the shine out of me altogether! No, no, Medwyn, a man at my time of life wants an article of a very different kind. But she would suit a young fellow like yourself."

"*Excusez moi*, Major,—her jewellery and dresses would make too large a hole in my allowance—only just sufficient at present to keep my head above water. Do for Bertie, when his wife hops off with Willoughby,—and, by Jove, sir, I hope she will serve him with some of the same sauce he is so lavish in bestowing on that poor little woman!—a deuced deal too good for such a half-French, half-Turkish sort of fellow, who treats

her like a slave. Poor thing! she looks broken-hearted to-night. By-the-bye, Major, they say Florence Seaton is booked for a longish journey with her cousin Sinclair. Is it true?"

"I can't say, Medwyn, although believing it very likely to be the case."

"Turned the cold shoulder upon you gentlemen in the barracks, eh, Mercer?"

"The *on dit* is, that she was engaged to him more than six months ago. So you see the victory had been won before we entered the field."

"Well, Mercer, the officers of the —th Light Dragoons are not the only men put *hors de combat* by our county *belle*. But Mordaunt looks as if he required an ounce of soda to cure the heartburn, and, like a moth hovering round the candle which has burnt its wings, cannot resist the alluring fascination of those bright eyes."

Mordaunt had elicited this last observation of Medwyn's, from being seen at that moment standing up in a quadrille with Florence, who, taking compassion on his forlorn looks that

evening, had accepted him as a partner ; and believing him now convinced of her true sentiments towards him, her usual cheerful manner had returned.

"This is the last night," he remarked, "that I may ever have the pleasure of dancing with Miss Seaton, although I hope we may sometimes meet again. Next week I obtain leave of absence, and probably shall not return to this neighbourhood any more."

"I am sorry to hear you say so, Captain Mordaunt," she replied.

"Can you feel any sorrow at my departure, Miss Seaton?" he asked, in surprise.

"I shall regret your leaving us," she said, very calmly, so calmly as to subdue at once all reviving hope.

"I cannot expect to meet you again as Miss Seaton," he added, "although the letter S may still be the initial of your name."

"I really do not comprehend you, Captain Mordaunt."

"Sinclair begins with the same letter, to whom report speaks of you as engaged."

“You are entirely misinformed,” she said, gravely; “this is not true.”

“To whom, then, are you engaged?” he asked, abruptly, in his nervous anxiety to know the truth.

“That question Captain Mordaunt has no right to ask, even were his supposition correct that I am engaged at all.”

“I humbly beg pardon for my attempted intrusion on your secrets, Miss Seaton, yet my question was not dictated by idle curiosity, but from the deepest interest in your future happiness. May I hope we shall still be friends?”

“It will always afford me pleasure to regard you in that light,” she said, “on the condition that you do not again revert to this subject.” And with this reply Mordaunt felt he must rest contented.

The two heaviest hearts that night were those of Mrs. Bertie and Mordaunt, each hopeless of brighter prospects, from the same cause—blighted affection. Still, Mordaunt’s was the brighter of the two. *He*, at least, was free to roam through the wide world

alone, with no more bitter reflections than those arising from unrequited love. The curse of sin, shame and sorrow, would follow *her* through every clime, through every changing scene of life, to its final close.

That night sealed her fate. The tempter saw that his time had arrived, when with flashing eyes Mrs. Bertie spoke of this last insult from her husband; and before that hour the following night, she had broken her marriage-vow, and was flying with Willoughby, in a carriage with four horses, from her once happy home.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WE must now recur to Forest Lodge, a short time after Sinclair's departure, where we find Mrs. Seaton giving way to a fresh outbreak of indignation on discovering that Mr. Chaffman's bubble had burst, with the loss of her money in the Heddington Bank.

"Only three shillings in the pound," she exclaimed, with astonishment, to that gentleman, "after all your assurances that I should be paid in full!"

"I am distressed beyond measure, my dear madam, to be the bearer of such unwelcome news, but fear there is little prospect of a further dividend. I also am a great loser by

this unfortunate failure, having placed the greatest confidence in Mr. Franklyn's prudence and integrity ; in short, my dear madam, no man enjoyed more universal respect, and all, with myself, have been wofully deceived. Still, my dear madam, having advised you in this step, I feel myself personally bound to make good the loss you have sustained."

"That I cannot allow you to do, Mr. Chaffman, believing you advised me for the best ; and I really can no longer receive the interest you have so generously paid me, which I am resolved for the future not to make use of if sent ;" and she was proceeding in this strain, when Mr. Chaffman, rising, said—

"You really must excuse me, my dear madam, listening to thanks I do not deserve , and having pressing business this morning, I must now take my leave."

That evening, however, Mrs. Seaton made known to Florence her resolution of not again using the money, and if obliged to receive it, she should lay it by for her daughter.

"My own folly has caused you this heavy loss, my poor child," she continued, "and it

is hard you must bear the consequences ; still, the principal being gone, I cannot submit to be the recipient of Mr. Chaffman's bounty, although fully sensible of his delicate generosity. Retrenchment, therefore, my dear Florence, is the only course we can adopt under our altered circumstances."

"To that, my dearest mother, I will most cheerfully submit, although I must repeat what I have before said, that I do not believe we are indebted to Mr. Chaffman for the quarterly payment you now refuse to use."

"To whom, then, can we be indebted?" asked Mrs. Seaton.

"That I cannot tell," replied Florence ; "but might not my uncle, of whom I have heard you speak as being so rich, be our secret benefactor?"

"For years I have heard nothing of him, my dear child ; and Mr. Chaffman tells me he is in India, and married, with a large family—so it can scarcely be attributed to him."

Florence, unable to shake her mother's first impression, and fearing to make any allusion

to Macgregor, repressed further remarks on this subject.

A second letter had now reached her from Calcutta, in which Hugh, after stating his intention of leaving the next day for the station to which he had been directed by Macgregor, wrote, that calculating the distance he had to travel, and making allowance for delays on the journey, he should, in all probability, take his passage home in the ship *Juno*, advertised to sail from Calcutta about the time of his anticipated return to that place. Florence was overjoyed on receiving this most welcome intelligence, which was communicated also to Mrs. Seaton by Ramsey, who, on calling that morning, said—

“I think you will be delighted to hear, my dear madam, that my friend Fitzwarine may be expected to return very shortly, as his mother has just received a letter from him, almost fixing the time of his departure from India.”

“I am glad Mrs. Fitzwarine has received such good news from her son,” was the short response, implying, “I do not wish to hear

more of him," which had the effect of cold water thrown on fire, by immediately damping the kindling embers of poor Florence's hopes.

Time passed slowly on, as it ever appears to do, when we are in feverish expectation of receiving welcome news; and Florence had begun now to count the days, almost the hours, which would intervene before Hugh's return to his native land—when she was surprised one morning, soon after breakfast, by a visit from Mr. Ramsey alone, who asked her to take a drive with him to the Abbey, as his wife was unwell, and wished to see her. Concluding from his look that some misfortune had occurred, with trembling alacrity, poor Florence quickly prepared to comply with his wishes. But her anxiety could no longer be suppressed, when they passed through the Lodge gates.

"Pray tell me now," she asked, "what has happened?—some dreadful calamity, I fear. Oh! let me know the worst at once."

"The worst I cannot tell you, dear Miss Seaton, for it is not ascertained; but you

know I always trust in the mercies of an overruling Providence, who often brings light out of darkness. We have received bad news this morning from India—but it may not be true.”

“Then,” she exclaimed, in agony, “Hugh Fitzwarine is dead !”

“Oh, no—indeed, there is no proof of that,” he answered, quickly ; “several passengers are said to have escaped, and saved themselves in the boats from the wreck of the *Juno*. God grant my dear friend Hugh may be of that number ! He is young and active, and I hope and believe is saved.”

Florence fell back on the seat, bursting into a flood of tears, and sobbing convulsively.

“My dear Florence,” said Ramsey, gently, “pray do not give way thus ; you must take comfort in that hope which supports me, for something whispers me that my dearest friend still lives. The account, after all, is imperfect, and we must wait for confirmatory intelligence of its truth. Pray, dear Florence, endeavour to compose yourself, or you will

add to Mrs. Fitzwarine's grief. I will not, dare not despair of his being restored to us again—neither must you. Read the paragraph for yourself," handing her the paper.

*"Wreck of the Juno, and loss of the greater portion of the passengers and crew.—*This vessel was wrecked off the coast of Africa, on her return from Calcutta, but some are supposed to have saved their lives by reaching the African coast in the boats belonging to the ship. Further intelligence is anxiously expected; this information is derived from the mate of the ill-starred vessel, who was picked up from a raft, nearly exhausted, by the *Ariadne.*"

Florence, satisfied by this paragraph that all were not decidedly lost, began to entertain a latent hope, and, encouraged by Mr. Ramsey, endeavoured to suppress further manifestations of sorrow; but when ushered into Mrs. Fitzwarine's presence, and held in her embrace, her tears and sobs again burst forth with renewed agony. We will draw a veil over this affecting interview, when Mrs. Fitzwarine was the first to attempt consoling

Florence, although the blow had fallen with almost overwhelming force upon herself. The fountain of her own grief ceased to flow as she witnessed the more intense agony of her adopted daughter.

Mr. Ramsey, who had left the room on introducing Florence for a full hour, now appeared, and, after a pious exhortation to both to submit with patience and resignation to the Divine Will, he had the satisfaction of returning Florence to Forest Lodge in a more composed state of mind, who, knowing her mother's objection to Hugh, tried to suppress her feelings in her presence; but Mrs. Scaton, observing her depressed manner and abstracted air during dinner, when she scarcely tasted anything, at once surmised the cause, and when the cloth was removed, said, in a soothing tone,—

“I fear, my dear child, you have heard some unpleasant news this morning at the Abbey?”

Florence could no longer restrain her pent-up feelings, and burst into tears. The mother's heart melted at the sight of her

child's sorrow, and, with endearing expressions of unfeigned sympathy, she learnt the cause of her heavy distress, which revealed to her for the first time her daughter's deeply-rooted affection for Hugh Fitzwarine.

"Do not grieve so, my own dearest child," exclaimed Mrs. Seaton, herself affected to tears, "we must hope for the best; and believing now your sincere attachment to this young man, I will not add to your misery by refusing my consent to your union, should he be spared to return."

Florence threw herself into her mother's arms, but tears and sobs were the only response she could make, for her kind and unexpected concession; and from that hour complete confidence was re-established between them, save on that one point forbidden by Macgregor.

The subject of Hugh's possible escape was often adverted to afterwards by Mrs. Seaton, who appeared now to take a deep interest in his fate, and this alone was sufficient to alleviate the poignancy of her daughter's suffering. Days and weeks passed away, and

no further particulars of the wreck of the *Juno* appeared in the public papers. Poor Florence allowed hope scarcely any longer to linger in her breast, and with Hugh's picture in her hand, she would sit for hours together in the seclusion of the glen, shedding tears over the likeness of him she believed now lost to her for ever. The spot where their hands had been joined together had become in her sight hallowed ground, where she could pour out her sorrows, and lift up her tearful eyes to Heaven.

It was whilst thus occupied one day that Macgregor again stood before her, but with altered mien and aspect. Sorrow had filled *his* heart also.

"Florence," he said, gently taking her hand, whilst his faltering tone betrayed his own emotion; "mourn not him as dead, who I trust is still among the living; that lad I have prayed to God for night and morning to be restored to us again, for we both love him, and my faith does not waver. I have not, however, been idle, for the moment the news reached me of the wreck of the vessel, and

some of the crew being cast on the African coast, I despatched a trusty messenger in search of them, who has travelled through a great part of that country—by this man, if living, he will be found. Let this hope cheer your spirits, my poor child, a little longer, but whatever woes or troubles await you, remember that he who has adopted Hugh Fitzwarine for his son, regards Florence Seaton as his daughter ;” and turning to conceal a starting tear, with a firm pressure of her hand in his, Macgregor walked slowly away.

As drowning persons catch at straws, so hope revived in the heart of Florence, when told by Macgregor of his having despatched a trusty person in search of her shipwrecked lover. It would be needless to relate the alternate hopes and fears of Florence. No further tidings arrived of Hugh Fitzwarine. Even Macgregor had disappeared,—his house being found shut up, with the windows and doors strongly barricaded against intruders.

Hope now became almost extinct in her breast, on hearing that Macgregor had also left his dwelling, without a farewell meeting with

herself. The sanguine heart of Ramsey failed him ; and now believing his friend indeed lost (although not admitting this to others), his unceasing efforts were directed to comfort and console the bereaved mother and Florence in their deep affliction. His pious exhortations were so far blessed with success, that both bowed with submission to the decrees of Providence, although in the retirement of their own chambers their tears still flowed fast, and a settled melancholy rested on their pale, care-worn features, which nothing could remove.

Mrs. Seaton tried in vain for some time to rouse her daughter from this state of apathy to everything around her—in vain urged her to leave Forest Lodge for change of scene. To the latter proposal she raised the strongest objection.

“ Ask me not to do this, dearest mamma,” she said, “ I acknowledge my grief has been very selfish, but feeling how kind and considerate you have been, it shall no longer be indulged.”

Mrs. Seaton, although yielding in this

point, invited a young and cheerful (and we must admit, lighthearted) acquaintance of her daughter's to stay with them, whose society she believed would prove very beneficial, to rouse her from her despondency.

Miss Clara Metcalfe was older than Florence by two years, very pretty, very plausible, and so generally attractive by her beauty and soft, winning manners, that she had already a dozen admirers, "all dying of love for her sake." She had been engaged to three of these swains, for whom, in turn, she had professed the strongest attachment for the time being, or rather interval between the day of proposal and the day fixed for marriage; but it had always happened that, after being engaged to one, she had seen another she liked better afterwards; and so this wilful, wayward girl, an only daughter, spoilt by her parent's too early indulgence, had gone on, heedless of her mother's remonstrances, dallying and flirting with one after another, undecided which to choose. But Mrs. Seaton was entirely ignorant of these proceedings, or Clara Metcalfe had never been invited to Forest Lodge. She

was a quiet, demure-looking little thing, all blushes and smiles in the company of persons older than herself; and flirtation the last charge the most astute physiognomist would lay at her door. Even Florence was ignorant of her true disposition; and she soon succeeded, by a show of great affection, in ascertaining the cause of her friend's depression of spirits, from which she attempted to rally her into a more cheerful mood.

“My dear Florence,” she exclaimed, one day when walking in the glen together, “you really distress me by your still, mournful looks; indeed, my dear, men, the very best, are not worth half the fuss we make about them; and we always long most for what we can't obtain. Now, you know, I was desperately in love at first with Captain Mason, of whom I have told you. I could think of nothing else; he was so handsome, so gentlemanlike, so agreeable, and so devotedly attached to me, that I thought my heart must and would certainly break, if I could not marry him. Well, papa and mamma gave their consent to our union at the end of twelve

months—an age in my sight then ; but before six months had passed, I began to tire of the same over and over again love-professions, and I thought to myself, when within a month of the time fixed for the ceremony, if my feelings are such before, what will they be after marriage ? And so, my dear Florence, I told my intended husband that I really could not, and would not, marry him. A scene was the consequence ; but finding me resolved, his passion overcame his prudence, and this violent outbreak of temper (entirely suppressed during our courtship) at once revealed my lover's true character. I had a most fortunate escape, since which my mind is made up never to fall desperately in love with any man again. But you see, dear Florence, had we been separated for some months—had an objection been raised by parents—obstacles would have increased our ardour ; and after marriage, when too late, we should have made the discovery that our dispositions would never harmonize. In short, men being, as I believe, all alike tyrants at heart, the wisest course for women is to put love out of the question, and

marry a man of good fortune, whether handsome or plain ; the husband can then go his way, and the wife hers, for their several amusements, if their tempers don't agree."

"I cannot agree with you, Clara, on these points," replied Florence.

"Not now, perhaps, dear girl, but you will when as old and wise as I am."

As the frozen snow melts gradually before the sun, so the obduracy of Florence Seaton's melancholy gave way by slow degrees to the cheerful, light humour of Clara Metcalfe ; and a few neighbours were occasionally invited by Mrs. Seaton, to break the monotony of their country life.

Mr. and Miss Chaffman had dined there one evening, when, after they had left, Mrs. Seaton asked Clara what she thought of the gentleman.

"Good-looking, certainly," she replied, "some would call him handsome—very agreeable, and apparently good-humoured, if not good-tempered."

"Well, Clara, would he suit you for a husband ?"

“Not unlikely, dear Mrs. Seaton, as I think men of his age are more formed in character than those very young ; and if good-tempered, with sufficient fortune, I see no objection any girl could take to Mr. Chaffman.”

“Everyone speaks of his kindness and affection for his first wife, Clara, whom he lamented many years ; and as to fortune, he is reported rich, with a fine place called Ashton Hall.”

“Well, dear Mrs. Seaton, he must first propose, and then perhaps I may think the matter over.”

Now it is quite true that Chaffman was taken at first uncommonly with the beauty of Clara, as so many other men had been ; but he calculated on other things besides the mere personal charms of any woman, however angelic-looking in features ; nevertheless, from some excuse or other, he paid frequent visits to Forest Lodge, and Clara flirted with him in her quiet manner, until she really thought he intended proposing ; but Miss Clara overshoot the mark. Men don't like too easy a conquest, and Chaffman drew back as the lady

advanced, now transferring his attentions to Florence, who received them, as heretofore, with the most perfect indifference. Still, his constant endeavours to please the ladies with little excursions about the country (it was now Midsummer) drew from her the admission one day—"Really Mr. Chaffman is very kind in doing so much to amuse us." In short, Chaffman had now become quite a lady's man, calling continually at Forest Lodge, from Clara telling him they could not dispense with his services.

With the *clairvoyant* privilege of an author, we must now see how far Hugh Fitzwarine had progressed, whose safe arrival at Calcutta we have before noticed. His journey to the civil station of Macgregor's friend had been accomplished, whence, after remaining a short time, he had again set out with the box of jewels and papers found in the spot described, and reached Calcutta a few days previous to the sailing of the ill-fated Juno.

Now Hugh Fitzwarine, although not strictly speaking superstitious, had imbibed certain

ideas about dreams and omens from early childhood, and it is singular what a strong hold upon the mind and memory in after-life nursery stories and doggerel rhymes retain, even when those of later date have been entirely forgotten. A solitary magpie crossing his path, always brought to Hugh's recollection the old saying about these birds—

“One means sorrow, two mean mirth,
Three a wedding, four a birth.”

And notwithstanding the absurdity of the thing, he had a particular objection to a single bird of this species. To the raven great importance was attached for having been employed to feed the prophet Elijah by the brook Kedron, so that the nests of these birds were never molested on the Abbey domain, where, in the fork of a high oak tree, a pair of ravens had repaired their nest, and hatched their young year after year without interruption. Dreams also exercised a certain influence over Hugh's mind, from reading of the dreams and visions of the people of God in ancient times, when His will was revealed through these

sacred impressions on the soul of man, as his body lay in the death-like calm of sleep.

After having secured his berth in the *Juno*, Hugh dreamed two nights following that the vessel was shipwrecked, and himself with some of the crew cast on an unknown island, through which they were wandering in awful plight, without clothing or provision, when another vessel hove in sight, and sent its boat to their rescue—he was once more at home sitting with Florence in the glen. So great an impression did the recurrence of this dream produce on Hugh's mind, that he at first resolved to wait for another ship which would sail three weeks or a month later ; but having written to both his mother and Florence his intention of taking passage in the *Juno*, his anxiety to return home overcame his misgivings on account of the dream. Still, as a matter of precaution, he deposited Macgregor's papers and jewels in the bank to which he had been recommended.

In case of accidents, however, Hugh provided himself with a double-barrelled gun and ammunition, which would prove of more ser-

vice than jewels or gold, if it should be his fate to be cast like Robinson Crusoe on a desert island. How far his dreams and forebodings were realised, will have been seen by the wreck of the ill-fated ship !

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. CHAFFMAN was not long permitted to enjoy his monopoly of the young ladies' society, and Miss Clara, from his reluctance to advance as rapidly as she expected, soon attracted a more youthful admirer in the person of Lieutenant Carleton, who had become desperately enamoured with her beauty ; and she in return could not forbear contrasting the young lively officer with the steady plausible lawyer.

“ My dear Florence,” she remarked one day, “ my wise resolutions are all giving way to Captain Carleton, who is quite irresistible, and I really must hand over Mr. Chaffman to your tender mercies ; he is much better suited, my

dear, to your more grave ideas—in short, I believe he will make you an excellent husband ; but Carleton is better adapted to a madcap like myself, who loves fun and frolic.”

“I do not intend to marry at all, Clara,” replied Florence with a deep sigh, “and certainly should never think of Mr. Chaffman, who appears to have taken a great fancy to you.”

“Well, Florence, if such be the case, I have two strings to my bow, or rather two beaux to my apron-string, and after a fair trial, shall select which will suit best ; but at present the scarlet jacket looks likely to prove the winner.”

“Really, Clara, you are a very extraordinary girl to trifle with men’s affections in this heartless manner.”

“Trifle with their affections, my dear Florence ! why, you do not believe, do you, that love would break any man’s heart ? Ah ! no, my dear unsophisticated friend, a sledge-hammer would not do it, although, if you listen to their professions, you will believe them as soft as a lady’s pincushion. Girls pine and fret

themselves nearly to death ; but where do you find an instance of a man committing such folly for love ? We are angels and divinities before marriage ; but when they have obtained their wishes, indifference or neglect proves the insincerity of their attachment."

"Surely all are not alike, Clara, there must be very many exceptions."

"Very few, my dear, I believe ; for amongst all my married friends, I don't know one thoroughly happy couple,—although there is one plain, elderly gentleman of my acquaintance, who does still appear to dote on his young, handsome wife, because he feels grateful for her accepting him, when, poor deluded soul ! she took him for his money. *She* is an old man's darling ; but as to her loving such a fright, that everybody can see is not the case, except himself."

"With such an opinion of men and marriage, I am surprised, Clara, you should ever think of marrying at all."

"Must do it, Florence, before my beauty fades, for a settlement in life—but I shall put off the evil day as long as possible."

While the two girls were discussing these matters in Florence's room, Chaffman was cautiously approaching the same subject, or nibbling at the same bait, with Mrs. Seaton down stairs in the drawing-room.

On the departure of Sinclair, and ascertained rejection of Mordaunt (which Carleton, *inter pocula*, let out one night, when dining at Ashton Hall), this crafty politician, who had waited patiently for his opportunity, now seeing the coast clear of suitors, began, like a tiger, stealthily to advance towards what he considered his almost certain victim. He knew the favourable impression he had already made on Mrs. Seaton, and her entire confidence in his integrity, independent of the other far greater consideration with mothers generally — his reputed wealth, and fine country residence. But he did not know the cause of her daughter's depression, which he was beating about the bush to ascertain.

"Miss Seaton," he remarked, "appears in very low spirits; some little disappointment, I fear, my dear madam; perhaps you did not

approve of Major Sinclair, to whom report gave your daughter as positively engaged?"

"There is not the slightest foundation for such a report, Mr. Chaffman, I assure you, as Major Sinclair never spoke to me on the subject, and we have always looked upon him as one of the family. But I fear she has indulged a romantic partiality for Mr. Fitzwarine, whose untimely fate every one has lamented. This I may tell you, Mr. Chaffman, as my confidential adviser, depending on your secrecy."

"You may rest assured, my dear madam, that not a word on this subject shall pass my lips. But you had a most fortunate escape by the removal of this young gentleman, whose violence of temper is well known, and his pecuniary resources quite insufficient to support a wife in the position Miss Seaton has a right to expect."

"It was said he had a comfortable income, independent of his mother," replied Mrs. Seaton.

"A mere trifle, my dear madam—say a hundred and fifty pounds a-year; well, enough

for a young man residing with his mother, pay his tailor's bill, and a few odds and ends ; but the idea of his marrying a beautiful, accomplished young lady like Miss Seaton, on such a pittance, is perfectly absurd. It was always hard work at the Abbey to make both ends meet, till some land was taken in hand, which scarcely supplies the family with bread and cheese. Then the outgoings—interest on mortgages, &c. &c. Miss Seaton has had, as well as yourself, a most fortunate escape.”

“You are not to understand, Mr. Chaffman, that Mr. Fitzwarine ever received my sanction to pay his addresses to my daughter ; in fact, he never alluded even to such a thing.”

“Oh ! of course not ; how could he presume to do so ? A little piece of youthful flirtation only between the young people—that was all, my dear madam, I take it. But there is no saying how these things might end. Lucky it went no further—just nipped in the bud ;—a little grateful feeling, I dare say, on the part of Miss Seaton, for his rescuing her from the moat—very natural to a young lady of her kind disposition, very natural indeed ;

young ladies in their teens are very romantically inclined."

"Are they?" asked Clara Metcalfe, who had just entered the room; "and old gentlemen, I can assure you, Mr. Chaffman, are very prosily inclined, and dreadful bores."

"No doubt, in your estimation, Miss Metcalfe; but some young ladies do not consider a salad complete without *lobster* sauce."

"Which is far more palatable than *goose-quill* sauce," retorted Clara, with a contemptuous look at the lawyer, which, to carry on the metaphor in vulgar parlance, settled Mr. Chaffman's hash, or cooked his goose—for he began to fear this young lady's tongue, which could utter very sharp things. She might turn him into ridicule before Miss Seaton, or prejudice her against him; so, influenced by these considerations, Chaffman treated her from this evening with the utmost politeness, never venturing again on any allusion to *lobster* sauce.

Now Mr. Croly Chaffman, who had studied deeply the book of nature, as well as books of law, was not slow to discover that the little

acerbities he could safely indulge against the Abbey family in the presence of Mrs. Seaton, were likely to be ill received by her daughter; he therefore trimmed his sails accordingly before Florence, and on the first fitting opportunity, when alone with her, he launched out into the deepest commiseration for the fate of poor Hugh.

“Ah, my dear Miss Seaton,” he exclaimed, “a sad, mournful fate indeed for that excellent young man, so dutiful and attentive to his poor widowed mother; poor dear lady—quite broken-hearted, I am told—no wonder,—bring down her grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.” And the lawyer turned aside, pretending to wipe away a crocodile’s tear from his eye with his cambric pocket-handkerchief. “I am very foolish, I know, dear Miss Seaton, to exhibit my feelings before you; but when the news of his loss arrived, there was scarcely a dry eye in the parish;—so young, so kind-hearted, so beloved;” and again the cambric was raised to his face.

“Pray, Mr. Chaffman, say no more on this subject!” cried Florence, scarcely able to sup-

press her tears. "Mrs. Fitzwarine is one of my kindest friends, and I do lament most truly with you her sad, irreparable loss, which, I fear, will soon bring her to the grave."

How softening, how affecting is sympathy (even from a stranger) to the sorrowful and afflicted ! Florence hitherto regarded Chaffman with indifference, if not dislike ; and now suddenly a change had been effected in her heart by these few words of pity, and the outward semblance of a tear shed for the fate of Hugh Fitzwarine. Who has not in like manner been affected by the falling tear and mournful face of some looker-on, when standing by the open grave of a dear relative or friend ? who has not longed, when sorrow has thus filled his heart, to shake hands with the humblest mourner at that grave-side who has shown a fellow-feeling in our bereavement ?

Such thoughts and feelings were those of Florence Seaton towards Croly Chaffinan, now become an altered being in her sight ; and from this time forward, on fitting opportunities, he would again cautiously approach the subject in the most delicate manner, until she

became nearly a convert to her mother's opinion, that he was one of the most kind-hearted men in the world.

Perceiving the road open to her favour, and hearing her sometimes express a doubt as to Hugh's fate, Chaffman now recollected that he had a cousin at the Cape, a captain in one of the regiments lately sent out to suppress a fresh outbreak of the Caffirs.

"Oh, Mr. Chaffman," she said quickly, "perhaps he may have heard something of the missing boat's crew, and relieve Mrs. Fitzwarine from her dreadful state of uncertainty about her son."

"It shall be done immediately," replied Chaffman eagerly. "I will write this very day to my cousin, desiring him to set every enquiry on foot, and search high and low, among Bushmen, Hottentots, and Caffirs, to ascertain his fate; although I fear, dear Miss Seaton, his life would not be spared if fallen into the hands of these people. Still, every search and enquiry shall be made without delay."

Florence expressed her grateful thanks, with tears in her eyes, for his great kindness, say-

ing she would inform Mrs. Fitzwarine of his generous sympathy in her distress ; and thus a theme for private conversation was opened between them, apparently most interesting to both. The visits of Chaffman were no longer regarded with indifference—he was always welcomed now with a sickly smile and warm shake of her willing hand ; and when Clara Metcalfe, on Carleton's calling, proposed a walk through the grounds, Florence no longer dreaded, as on former occasions, being left alone with Croly Chaffman, and he well knowing the cause of her altered behaviour towards him, wisely forbore to trespass further by making any allusion to softer sentiments.

Carleton and Chaffman were returning home together on horseback one afternoon from Forest Lodge, after a long ramble in the glen, when the former remarked, “ You appear to be making progress, old fellow, in gammoning Miss Seaton ; none of our fellows could get her to walk for a minute, much less an hour, with them alone, as she now does with you.”

“Waiting horses sometimes win,” replied Chaffman with a knowing smile.

“Quick, march, is a soldier’s motto, Croly, and I have popped the question this very morning, and am accepted.”

“You are not serious, are you, Carleton?”

“Yes, by Jove! old fellow—the thing is settled, and I shall get you to draw up the settlements, for, according to the old saying, ‘Happy’s the wooing that’s not long adoin’g.’”

“But there’s another, quite as likely to prove true, ‘Marry in haste, and repent at leisure,’ and I suspect Miss Clara is too flighty to make a good wife; besides, you have known her so short a time that you can form a very incorrect opinion of her true character, which strikes me as that of a regular flirt.”

“Can’t be helped now, Croly—she is out and out the prettiest girl, to my fancy, I have ever seen, and I really am so desperately in for it this time, that marry her I must. And I advise you not to let the grass grow under your feet; Mordaunt and I agree that Miss S.

has met with some disappointment, and as she seems to have a preference for you above all others, now is your time, she may take you, when from pique girls are in the humour to accept the first good-looking man that offers ; wait till that is over, and she will say ‘good-bye’ to Croly Chaffman.”

“Well, Carleton, *I* must now say ‘good-bye’ to you, as our roads diverge ; but I have no intention of proposing to Miss Seaton now, if I ever should,” and setting spurs to his horse, he galloped off in another direction. Chaffman laughed as he rode away—“No, no, Carleton, you are not the man to be trusted with secrets of mine,” and his caution was well adopted, since on their next meeting, Carleton told Clara that he had no intention of proposing for her friend ; which gratifying intelligence was communicated to Florence that same night when they retired to their rooms, by Clara saying—

“What do you think, my dear, Carleton ascertained yesterday from Mr. Chaffman, that his attentions to you were merely those of a neighbour and friend of the family, nothing

more—when I really believed he had actually proposed.”

“I should have been much surprised if he had, Clara,” was her quiet reply.

“Well, I can only say if any man behaved to me in that manner, I would never speak to him again.”

“You do not know perhaps, Clara, that Mr. Chaffman is mamma’s legal adviser as well as neighbour, and that his visits here are frequently on business.”

“Well, that alters the case, Florence ; but I dare say you will be surprised when I tell you that Carleton and myself are actually engaged already.”

“I am not very greatly surprised, Clara, after the violent flirtation which has been going on between you ; but what will Lady Metcalf say to this engagement, without being consulted ?”

“Not very much that I fear, my dear, as I always have my own way at home, and there can be no objection to Carleton, who has an independent fortune without his commission, and fifteen hundred a-year in perspective.

Any mother would consider this an eligible match, and if mamma does not view it in this light, it cannot be helped now—I shall marry to please myself.”

END OF VOL. II.

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